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# The Challenge of Islamists for EU and US Policies: Conflict, Stability and Reform

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## Foreword

*Muriel Asseburg and Daniel Brumberg*

Islamist politics pose one of the most important and complex set of challenges that the US and Europe face today. Foreign policies have not reflected that complexity adequately, but have focused to a large degree on Islamist actors with a global jihadist agenda and the global “war on terror.” Also, while the debates in the academic and think tank community around the inclusion of Islamists have found their way into US democracy promotion approaches, they have been much less reflected in European policies. This volume therefore sheds light on some of the issues linked to political Islam that have been less treated in academic analysis, and on countries which have attracted less attention, but offer interesting insights with regards to democracy promotion and/or peace building. The contributions revolve around a set of overlapping questions: What is the relevance of Islamist actors for the peaceful transition of authoritarian systems? What can we learn from state-society relations and the inclusion of Islamists in Muslim majority democracies such as Turkey or Indonesia? What is the relevance of Islamist actors for the peaceful transformation of conflicts in cases such as Sudan or Somalia? What are EU and US approaches and policies towards Islamist actors and governments in the Muslim world? And finally, what would a shared transatlantic agenda towards the Muslim world look like, and in which policy fields are cooperation, coordination, or a division of labor most promising?

In the first section of this volume, two contributions look at the *challenges for and the framing of policies towards the Muslim world*. The contributions offer insights into the diverse factors that shape US debates and policies towards the region, including threat perceptions and geo-strategic interests. While Daniel Brumberg focuses on the question of why certain foreign policy paradigms dominate at certain times, Steven Heydemann develops a matrix to understand the different elements that add up to specific policies at particular junctures. The second section examines the political inclusion of *Islamists in Muslim majority democracies*. Steven Cook points out the tremendous reform achievements that the Islamist AKP government in Turkey has realized. Felix Heiduk stresses the complexity of the Islamist scene in Indonesia. In both Turkey and Indonesia, EU and US policies, while being quite different, have been inadequate with regards to promoting democratic transitions. The third section focuses on *the use and abuse of Islam in framing conflicts and policies*. Two contributions, from Dorina Bekoe on Sudan and Annette Weber on Somalia, analyze the role of Islam in violent conflicts and point to the multiple sources of conflict behind religious appeals. They also underscore the relevance of the inclusion of Islamist actors for the peaceful transformation of conflicts. The fourth

section on the *political participation of Islamists in authoritarian systems* discusses the relevance of Islamist actors for the peaceful transition of authoritarian systems and European and US policies towards Islamist movements, parties and authoritarian governments. Eva Wegner looks at the effects that political inclusion has had on the development of the Islamist movement in Morocco. Mona Yacoubian points out the relevance of the Islamist-secular opposition alliance in the case of Yemen. Les Campbell summarizes the experiences that the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has made in engaging Islamists in democracy promotion efforts. A final paper by Muriel Asseburg sketches out *elements of a shared US-EU agenda towards the Muslim world* in the fields of democracy promotion, stabilization policies and efforts to peacefully transform conflicts.

This volume is based on selected and edited contributions to a workshop that was co-organized by Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP, or the German Institute for International and Security Affairs), and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) on 27–28 September 2007. The views expressed reflect the judgments of the authors and are not meant to represent the positions of any of the institutions involved. The workshop brought together American and European academics, practitioners, and policy-makers to inform the policy debate about the diverse challenges that the rise of Islamist actors poses, and to exchange knowledge, experiences and practices. The conference was part of the “Diverging Views on World Order? Transatlantic Foreign Policy Discourse in a Globalizing World” project that has been conducted by SWP with a whole range of US partner institutes since 2002 with the generous support of the German Marshall Fund (GMF). Current and former working group’s descriptions, workshop reports and publications can be found at the project’s website at [www.tfpd.org](http://www.tfpd.org).

## **Challenges for and Framing of Policies Towards the Muslim World**



## Between Realism and Wilsonianism: The US and the Muslim World after Iraq

Daniel Brumberg

Nowhere do the tensions and contradictions that animate American foreign policy display themselves more decisively than in the Muslim world. Barely four years after the Bush administration inaugurated its “Freedom Agenda,” democracy activists have been demoralized by Washington’s support for some of the Muslim world’s least freedom-loving regimes. It is possible that the administration’s initially sharp criticism of President Musharaf’s November 2007 crackdown on the democratic opposition signals the high water mark of a democracy backlash that was provoked in 2005, when civil war in Iraq and Islamist electoral successes in Palestine and Egypt sent shock waves throughout the American foreign policy establishment. Still, Pakistan’s increasingly isolated general has good reason to hope that the escalating struggle against Islamist extremism will continue to swell the tides of a revived *realpolitik*, one that finds growing favor in the American foreign policy establishment, not to mention in the palaces and presidential mansions of several of Washington’s closest Muslim allies.<sup>1</sup>

While the mercurial nature of its foreign relations was vividly displayed by America’s response to the horrors of September 11, Washington’s long-studied foreign policy dualism has deep historical roots. Since its very inception, American diplomacy has alternated between bouts of isolationism backed by the occasional use of force and selective intervention, and high minded efforts to engage the world in the name of a universal creed that the US is thought to embody.

The end of the Cold War seemed to open up space to forge a more consistent foreign policy. The disappearance of Washington’s chief rival and ensuing democratization of Central Europe lowered the geo-strategic risks of democracy, a development that was conceptually reinforced by the optimistic vision spelled out in the “end of history” and the “democratic peace” literatures. This political and ideological shift was crucial because it narrowed the ideological fault lines that had fractured the foreign policy establishment. The resulting consensus called for prioritizing democracy so long as doing so did not dramatically increase the risks of damaging American security interests. While not satisfying the most ardent human rights activists, this formula facilitated cooperation between foreign policy elites who had previously remained in fairly fixed ideological camps. Yet

<sup>1</sup> While President Bush initially suggested that Musharaf’s actions “would undermine democracy” he subsequently asserted that the general “truly is somebody who believes in democracy.” Such inconsistencies are bound to reassure Pakistan’s leaders. See Michael Abramowitz and Robin Wright, “Bush More Emphatic in Backing Musharaf,” *Washington Post*, 21 November 2007, p A01.

less than a decade later, the invasion of Iraq and escalation of US military involvement re-polarized the foreign policy establishment in ways that echo the bad old days of the Vietnam War.

### **From Limited War to Shock and Awe**

This development was hardly on the horizon when the US first responded to the attacks in New York and Washington. Indeed, the US intervention in Afghanistan echoed the traditional as well as realist impulses, i.e. to distance the US from foreign entanglements and to only use force when circumstances are seen to justify such action. The war in Afghanistan was first and foremost about defeating an enemy, not promoting democracy.

But it did not take very long for the other more expansive foreign policy impulse to manifest itself in what President Bush proclaimed was as a sea change in US relations with the Muslim world. This approach was animated by a desire to reach out to that world, to understand and engage it on behalf of what many believe to be universal aspirations. More philosophical than analytical, this neo-Wilsonian impulse was tied to the simplistic axiom that Islamist radicalism is a pathology resulting from a developmental disease. Treated with a healthy dose of democratic reforms, Muslim feelings of resentment and despair would subside, thus preparing the ground for a new era of freedom and prosperity throughout the Middle East. This theory was then tested in Iraq in the hope that toppling a dictator would eventually create an Arab polity that, while keeping with local cultural and religious traditions, reflected a universal desire for freedom.

It would be simplistic to attribute the invasion of Iraq to the influence of this or that foreign policy cabal or to the so-called “neo-conservatives.” Such reductionism misses the *revolutionary* dynamic that produced the Iraq invasion. As with most revolutions, this one gathered steam as different interests, motives, and players converged on a single agenda. Some of these players were genuinely committed to the principles of neo-Wilsonianism while others merely manipulated these ideals to camouflage a *realpolitik* agenda, one whose chief concern was the prospects for proliferation of unconventional weapons in the hands of state and non-state actors. This convergence of motives and actors may have helped bring Saddam Hussein’s regime down, but it could not be sustained as the human, political, and financial costs of occupying Iraq multiplied. By 2005, a revolutionary foreign policy that brought “shock and awe” had all but dissipated. In its wake was a divided foreign policy establishment that pitted an inchoate and weakened neo-conservative constituency against an ascendant group of realists who applauded signs of a more pragmatic approach within the Bush administration.

## The Vagaries of US Policy after Iraq

Paradoxically, the resulting backlash against democracy promotion owes much to Washington's missteps in Iraq and beyond.<sup>2</sup> By exacerbating a range of domestic and regional security challenges, these mistakes reinforced the leverage of actors at home and abroad who asserted that political reform undermines the "war on terror."<sup>3</sup> Still, several critical points have been lost in the rush to a new realism. These include the fact that in Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon, escalating security problems may have less to do with the intrinsic risks of democracy than with the minutiae of bad policy innovation and implementation. Even more so, critics fail to realize that the growing threat of radical Islamism in Pakistan may be due to the *failure* to support democracy. Thus, some of the hubris, wishful thinking, and analytical sloppiness that sent the American foreign policy pendulum careening in a messianic direction after September 11 could now be swinging it back with equally unreflective zeal.

While such a debilitating swing towards a foreign policy completely dominated by *realpolitik* logic cannot be ruled out, it is too early to sound the death knell of US democracy promotion in the Muslim world. What can be said with a fair degree of certainty is that the brief interlude of democracy as a matter of high policy has ended. Henceforth, American policy will be guided by two related principles. First, the intensity of commitment to democracy promotion – and in particular the readiness to engage with Islamists – will vary in inverse proportion to the security threats that Washington faces. Second, where and when such security challenges intensify, existing democracy promotion programs will probably endure, but they will also receive less and less political protection from our highest officials.

The following brief tour of the complex horizons of US policies in the Muslim world illustrates the above two axioms. In the Middle East, Turkey is the only Muslim country for which American support for democracy not only endures but is likely to thrive as a matter of high foreign policy. The AK Party's moderate policies, as well as Turkey's enduring and very stable geo-strategic relations with the US – relations that are of course a top concern of the Turkish military – have enhanced Washington's support for integrating Muslim parties and movements into Turkey's democratic experiment.

Further to the east, the Bush administration's early hopes that it would forge a similar relationship with Islamist forces in a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq have been dashed. Indeed, ethno-religious civil war and the bloody

<sup>2</sup> See Carl Gershman, "Surviving the Democracy Backlash, 25 Years Later, Ronald Reagan's Visionary Address Meets a Hard Historical Moment," *Washington Post*, 8 June 2007, p 19.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of how missteps in promoting political reform and democracy aggravated Washington's security challenges in Lebanon and Palestine see Daniel Brumberg, "Democracy and Security in the Middle East," *Democracy and Society*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, Spring 2007, p 1.

Sunni insurgency make it very unlikely that Washington will sustain the political will or the military means to transform Iraq's precarious and flawed power sharing government into a functioning democracy.

Washington's dream of a transformed Iran has been similarly deflated. Buoyed in 2003 by what it perceived to be a quick and sustainable victory in Iraq, policy makers within or close to the Bush administration suggested that Saddam Hussein's downfall would set the stage for a democratic revolution in Iran. But Iran's (much ignored) efforts at developing nuclear technology, disarray within the reformist camp and the resulting electoral victory of Mahmud Ahmadinejad – all of which unfolded against the backdrop of Tehran's enhanced political and strategic leverage in Iraq – took the winds from the Bush administration's neo-Wilsonian vision. In its wake remains an Iran policy driven by a *realpolitik* calculation that probably will endure even if Washington takes the still unlikely step of bombing Iran's nuclear facilities.

However central to the administration's grand vision of a post-Saddam Middle East, the cases of Iraq and Iran are exceptional. Rather than pushing for regime change in the wider Middle East, Washington continues to fund more conventional democracy promotion programs in Kuwait, Jordan, Yemen, Algeria and Morocco. In all five countries American democracy promoters have worked with secular and Islamist political parties. Indeed, in the case of Yemen, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) played a key role in promoting a formal alliance between the Islah Party and the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP).<sup>4</sup> This engagement strategy saw its high point in 2003-04, a brief but hopeful period during which President Bush proclaimed his support for democracy in the Arab world. Still, even during the resulting "Arab Spring," there was always a gap between Washington's bold rhetoric and the actual strategic focus of its political reform programs. The latter largely consisted of demand driven civil society projects that had little effect on the readiness of Arab governments to supply substantive political reform. Indeed, well before the escalation of civil conflict in Iraq and the electoral successes of Islamists in Palestine and Egypt in 2005, Washington did not press Arab governments to move beyond state controlled political liberalization. Thus, the political cover that Washington gave American groups such as NDI and IRI – as well as their Arab partners – began to shrink when the security challenges facing the US and key strategic Arab allies intensified in 2005-06. As a result, most of Washington's current democracy programs have not so much been down-sized as down-graded.

The prioritization of security over democracy concerns is especially manifest in those countries or regions considered of pivotal importance to US geo-strategic interests. Thus Washington works with mainstream Islamists in far-away Morocco, colorful Yemen, forgotten Algeria, and little Kuwait, but not in geo-strategically important Saudi Arabia or Egypt. In

<sup>4</sup> See Mona Yacoubian, "Engaging Islamists and Promoting Democracy: A Preliminary Assessment," USIP Special Report, No. 190 (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, September 2007), as well as her contribution in this volume, p 59ff.

the former case Washington has no democracy promotion programs, while in the latter Washington has avoided engaging the Muslim Brethren and has repeatedly failed to criticize Cairo's repression of democracy activists. For similar reasons, Washington backs autocratic Uzbekistan and will probably maintain a similar line in Pakistan, while it has virtually ignored democracy issues in its relations with Malaysia and Tunisia, two countries whose relatively successful efforts at export oriented industrialization have magnified the perceived risk of promoting political reform.

By contrast, in Indonesia – home to the world's single largest Muslim population – the US assists a range of Islamic parties and movements. Despite a growing climate of anti-Americanism that several prominent leaders have manipulated to substantially strengthen their support base, Washington maintains its indirect funding of powerful mass based Muslim organizations such as the 30 million strong *Mohammadiya*. In Indonesia, the slow but forward moving consolidation of democracy has complicated – rather than undercut – the security interests of Jakarta and Washington. Thus the US can pursue a more balanced foreign policy in a region where the struggle against local affiliates of Al Qaeda constitutes a “second front” in the war on terror, but where nevertheless the geo-strategic stakes are not as high as compared to the Middle East.

### What Is To Be Done?

Although the securitization of American policy has undercut Washington's support for democratic reform, efforts to engage the Muslim world and to promote reform, pluralism, and inclusion are unlikely to disappear. Where the perceived risks of pursuing both security and reform are seen to be small, engagement with Muslim leaders, political parties, and associations will survive and sometimes even thrive. Where those risks are viewed as high, democracy promotion will remain, at best, a matter of low rather than high policy. Thus the dualistic nature of American foreign policy, deeply embedded in American history and manifest in the institutional missions and identities of an array of competing official and non-governmental organizations, will continue to both animate and hobble the US approach to the Muslim world.

While neo-realists applaud the downgrading of democracy and neo-Wilsonianists decry it, Washington's critics within and beyond the Muslim world cling to the belief that American foreign policy suffers from a terminal case of double standards. But no country, especially a superpower, can afford to base its relations on one single standard or objective. Thus the challenge for the US, for its allies in Europe, and for genuine political reformers in the Muslim world, is to map a strategy by which power and principle can be more closely and consistently aligned. Although the dire security challenges born of the Iraq gambit will complicate this challenge, they should also serve as an incentive for transcending the conflicts and antagonisms that have divided Europe and the United

States. There is simply too much at stake to avoid the task of designing a more coherent approach, especially towards the Middle East.

Doing so will require paying close attention to the particular problems of prioritization and sequencing presented by different countries and regions. For example, in South Asia, and in Pakistan in particular, had Musharraf chosen a more democratic approach early on, he might have enhanced his government's struggle to tackle radical Islamist forces. As it happened, an opportunity to confront security interests democratically may have been lost. But in the Middle East, the regional context requires a different prioritization of security and democracy. As the record shows, by implying that democratization in Iraq would be a prelude to regime transformation in Tehran, Damascus, and Beirut, the Bush administration all but guaranteed that Iran and Syria would do their utmost to undermine American policy. Like it or not, the effort to democratize Iraq would have required engaging rather than antagonizing Iran and Syria. Similarly, Washington's eight year failure to push hard and consistently for Palestinian-Israeli peace helped fragment Fatah and thus set the stage for a Hamas victory. In short, while the domestic and regional architecture of peace and security in the Middle East should not be used as an excuse for avoiding political reform, neither should it be ignored, de-prioritized or mis-handled in ways that undermine the long term prospects for real democratic change.

# The Challenge of Political Islam: Understanding the US Debate

*Steven Heydemann*

Islamist politics pose what might well be seen as the most significant and complex set of foreign policy challenges that the US has faced in the post-Cold War era. At the same time, these challenges have been exceptionally resistant to efforts to impose coherence on US responses to Islamists, to the often-intense frustration of those who prefer to cast the world in black and white terms, or to force policy into simplistic containers such as the global “war on terror.” Instead, it is the complexity and fluidity of the challenges associated with political Islam that have dominated US policy debates. Formulas proliferate for engaging or confronting militant Islam and political Islam more broadly. Tension and uncertainty about whether and how to engage Islamist challenges continue to roil the policy system. Along the Northeast corridor linking Cambridge, New York, and Washington, the punditocracy remains deeply divided, belligerently strutting its differences whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself.

Thus, almost 30 years after the Iranian revolution, and more than six years since the terrorist attacks of September 11, no overarching architecture for managing US responses to political Islam has taken hold. Despite the effort of policy academics such as Samuel Huntington to promote the notion of a “clash of civilizations” as the organizing principle for America’s grand strategy in a post-containment world, US policy toward Islamist politics remains profoundly disorganized. What those seeking coherence may not recognize, however, is that such a goal may be neither feasible nor desirable. The complexity of the challenges posed by Islamist politics does not lend itself to a sound bite approach to policy making. Nor is it appropriately addressed through rigid ideological prescriptions or one-size-fits all strategies. What is more important, in my view, is to understand the sources of the complexity, how US policy debates around the challenges of Islamist politics are organized, and what we can learn from this about where the major fault lines in US policy debates are to be found.

## Complex Challenges of Islamist Politics

Political Islam resists simplification for at least four reasons. The first is simply a matter of scale. Though the scope of the phenomenon is well known, it is worth reminding ourselves of the truly global scale on which the challenges of Islamist politics present themselves. They dominate or heavily influence policy agendas ranging from Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Lebanon, and Palestine – the large epicenter of US overseas commitments at the moment – to the rest of the Middle East, Turkey, and South Asia. They extend in tangible and influential ways into our relationships

across much of East Asia, a large part of Africa, the Balkans, and even to our European partners.

Second, Islamist challenges have enormous spillover effects on US diplomatic endeavors in other domains, notably democracy promotion. For almost two decades, the US commitment to democracy promotion in the Arab and Muslim worlds has been tightly linked to – and in many respects been contingent on – concern about what would happen if Islamists came to power. The threat of “one person, one vote, one time” has had a substantial dampening effect on US efforts to promote political reform in some of the world’s most resilient authoritarian regimes. Experiences of Islamist rule in Iran and recent Islamist violence in Palestine have done little to mitigate these concerns. Today, only four years after President Bush swept aside Republican reservations about nation building to embrace regime change with his so-called “Freedom Agenda,” the Administration has largely retreated from this Agenda’s adventurism and returned to a cautious, risk averse approach to political change in Muslim majority states. Ironically, this retrenchment comes just at the moment when some fifteen years of US effort to support moderate Islamist movements seemed to be paying off, with Islamist political parties and independent politicians actively participating in elections in Jordan, Morocco, Yemen and Egypt.

Third, Islamist challenges also spill over into the domestic politics of the US, driving debates about homeland security, the future of military budgeting and force structure, the future of multiculturalism, and the relationship between domestic security and civil liberties that all figure prominently in American politics, and will continue to do so in the run up to the 2008 presidential elections. For all of these reasons, expressions of Islamist politics intersect with a wider range of relationships and interests, foreign and domestic, than almost any other challenge the US confronts.

Fourth, the challenge of responding to the rise of Islamist politics has been so daunting for the US policy system because of the difficulty of defining precisely what these challenges are. What does it mean, for example, to talk about an Islamist challenge in Saudi Arabia? Does it mean the challenge of reforming the regime, or protecting it? What does an Islamist challenge mean in a case like Morocco, where Islamist movements like the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) and its competitors are themselves divided about how to confront a regime that is, itself, anchored in its Islamic identity and religious claims to legitimacy and the right to rule? What are the Islamist challenges the US faces in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan, where the threads of Islamist politics are so tightly and intricately woven into every strand of US relations with these countries that untangling them may well be impossible?

In virtually every Muslim society in which American interests are at stake, similar complexities confront the US. They are central for understanding why, as my colleague Daniel Brumberg points out, US policies toward Islamist challenges so often seem to be at odds with themselves, and are so often inconsistent in ways that leave the US exposed to charges of hypocrisy in its relations with Muslim societies and Islamist movements.

They are also central for understanding why what is often referred to by ideologues as “*the Islamist challenge*,” or concepts such as Huntington’s “clash of civilizations,” are inadequate starting points for understanding the dynamic of US debates and the struggle to shape policy responses to the challenges of Islamist politics.

## Elements of US Policies Towards the Muslim World

Instead, I would argue that it is more useful to think about policy debates in terms of six distinct elements and to understand how the interplay of these elements defines the organization of US policies in various settings where the US confronts the challenges of political Islam. The six elements are by no means unique to the challenges of Islamist politics, yet they are all visible in especially significant ways in this broad and diffuse domain. These six elements are:

1. **Engagement**, represented by a range of policy instruments that encompass Track 1 and Track 2 dialogue with key allies and extend to public diplomacy efforts, attention to issues of inter-faith dialog, and other related strategies. These approaches have been prominent in US relations with governments in Jordan and Morocco, but have been widely deployed in US policies toward the Muslim world. Engagement tends to be diffuse, has thus far not been terribly effective in changing the attitudes of Islamist actors toward the US, and has been subordinated to other policy elements when it comes to Islamist groups and parties identified by the US as terrorist organizations.
2. **Accommodation**, which tends to prevail in settings where security and economic interests are felt to be centrally at stake in US relations with the governments of Muslim majority states. This element is evident in US relations with Arab Gulf states in particular, which have not been subjected to the pressures for reform directed at regimes that are less central to US strategic concerns.
3. **Negotiation** figures more prominently in cases where the US perceives a benefit in seeking the realignment of local actors as a way of responding to Islamist pressures, as seen in recent efforts to encourage regimes to open space for moderate Islamist parties to participate in elections in Jordan and Egypt.
4. **Containment or Isolation**, which have emerged as a central instrument of US policy over the past several years, notably in response to the electoral victory of Hamas in Palestine, the perceived threat of Iran’s nuclear program, and in efforts to contain Hezbollah’s role in Lebanon and internationally.
5. **Confrontation**, which continues to define US policy toward extremist groups and terrorist networks such as Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and extremist movements operating in Iraq.

**6. Coordination**, an element of US policy that includes efforts to develop joint approaches toward Islamist actors with governments in the Arab world, South Asia, and Africa, as well as the increasing interest of the Bush administration in reviving multilateral strategies for responding to the challenges of Islamist politics with European and other allies.

Listing these elements is not intended to suggest that they constitute stand alone policy frameworks – quite the contrary. Typically, all six of these elements are present in a variety of combinations and forms throughout US policies in the Muslim world, overlapping and interacting in distinctive ways in specific contexts. Moreover, the preference for one element over another is not only context-sensitive, but also time-sensitive. Over time, policies that rest heavily on confrontation and containment have gained preference over those favoring accommodation and engagement in US policy debates.

### **Keeping Policy Options Open**

What is universally the case, however, is that US policy debates about how to respond to the challenges of Islamist politics play out in terms of disagreements and tensions, both publicly and within the policy community, over which *particular blend of these elements* should define US policy toward a specific Islamist challenge. Since September 11, and even more so since the electoral victory of Hamas and the rise of Iranian influence in the Arab Middle East, US debates have been dominated by distinct political factions that seek to define an Islamist group, government, or network as extremist in order to make confrontation a policy option when it might not otherwise have been seen as a viable course of action. This is most visible at the moment in debates about the future US course of action toward Iran, but is also evident in policy debates concerning Hamas, Hezbollah, and various Islamist parties across the Middle East.

There is, moreover, a characteristic dynamic to policy debates about Islamist challenges, with ideologues pressing to reduce the legitimate components of US policy to those elements anchored only in confrontation, isolation and containment. Realists and pragmatists, on the other hand, are less likely to view Islamist challenges in terms of one-size-fits-all policy responses. Instead, they work to preserve access to a wider range of instruments, seek strategies for incorporating them flexibly into frameworks that permit moving in a more accommodating or more confrontational direction in response to the level of threat in a given context.

Viewing these six elements as a kind of a matrix – and recognizing that the components of this matrix often overlap – offers insights into policy debates in the US about how to respond to the challenges of militant Islam. These debates are organized around reasonably predictable efforts by identifiable elements of the policy elite to determine which elements from this matrix should be deployed in any given case; how they should be sequenced; what would trigger a move from the engagement-accommo-

dation-negotiation side of the matrix toward the isolation-containment-confrontation side (e.g. the effort to establish benchmarks for judging Iran's compliance with UN Security Council directives); but also about which agencies within the policy system, notably the State Department or the Pentagon, will take the lead in defining and executing policy in any given instance.

To be sure, this conception of how US policy debates are organized is not intended to imply that the policy making process is either coherent or effective. Indeed, viewing policy as a fluid combination of these six components, and of ongoing bureaucratic and political debate, underscores the enormous demands that the management of Islamist challenges places on the US foreign policy system. Yet understanding how debates are structured helps to clarify why US policies in the Muslim world are themselves both complex and dynamic, shifting over time as conditions change, and as political weight within the US policy system shifts from one locus to another. US responses to the challenges of Islamists contain far too broad a mix of elements to be viewed through any framework that privileges confrontation and containment over the other components of the policy matrix. The central challenge for any American administration is to turn this flexibility and responsiveness into a policy asset rather than a source of confusion, mixed signals, and flawed implementation.



## **Islamists in Muslim Majority Democracies**



## Islamist Political Power in Turkey: Challenges for Brussels and Washington

Steven A. Cook

Turkey is undergoing profound change. In the last two decades, Turkish society has become more complex and differentiated as a new class of politicians, entrepreneurs, and activists has emerged and accumulated political power. The *Adalet ve Kalkınma Parti* (Justice and Development Party, AKP), which was founded after an historic split within Turkey's Islamist movement in 2000, represents this new elite. Since 2002 the party has held an overwhelming majority in Turkey's legislature, the Grand National Assembly. With the end of President Ahmet Necdet Sezer's term in office in the spring of 2007, the AKP succeeded in electing one of its own, Abdullah Gül, president. For a party that did not even exist in 2000, it was impressive that by the end of 2007, AKP was firmly in control of the executive and legislative branches of government. There are elements of the Turkish government, notably the Turkish General Staff and the judiciary, that are deeply suspicious of the party and its intentions. The expression and success of Islamist power that AKP represents is nothing less than extraordinary in Turkey's officially secular political order.

The emergence of AKP as the most important non-military actor in the Turkish political arena has generated an often heated national debate over, among other issues, the relationship between religion and state, the continued relevance of Kemalism, and the direction of Turkish foreign policy. The acceleration of Turkey's transition to democracy has been the most surprising development since AKP came to power in 2002. This is not to suggest that the party harbors an anti-democratic agenda. Hardly the Islamists of Hamas, Hezbollah, or even the Muslim Brotherhood, AKP's platform reveals that one of its primary goals is to forge a more democratic, modern, and pluralist Turkey. Indeed, at the time the party gained control of the parliament, the Turkish political system featured a range of authoritarian institutions and an influential military establishment intent on protecting the political order that Mustafa Kemal founded in 1924. In the 47 years since it first seized control of the country from a democratically elected government, the military undertook three additional *coups d'état*. Indeed, the combination of the structure of Turkish politics and the historical record indicated that AKP should have had difficulty pursuing its professed goals of political and economic reform.

Yet there was a new factor in Turkish politics that provided both an impetus for change and a favorable environment for AKP to embark on a wide-ranging project of reform in relative safety from the predatory politics of the General Staff: the European Union (EU). To be sure, Turkey has been an associate member of what was the European Economic Community since signing the Ankara agreement in 1963. Yet when combined

with the AKP's objectives, the EU's 1999 invitation to Turkey to become a candidate for full membership had a dynamic effect on Turkish politics. The incentive of EU membership altered the interests of Turkey's Islamists – who had traditionally been wary of and at times hostile to Turkey's Western vocation – and constrained the ability of the military to act. As a result, AKP was able to lead a coalition of conservative Muslims, big business, urban elites, and average Turks who, for a variety of interests, all supported the EU membership process. Between early 2003 and late 2004, the AKP-controlled parliament undertook seven reform packages – including measures that make it more difficult to close down political parties, enhance personal and political freedoms, and rein in (albeit incompletely) the General Staff – intended to bring Turkey's political system in line with European norms and standards.

Obstacles and problems remain before Turkey's democratic transition is complete. Still, there is no denying that Turkey is a different country from what it was five, ten, and fifteen years ago. To be sure, not all of the achievements are linked to the Justice and Development Party. For example, Turkey's impressive economic growth since 2002 has everything to do with the economic reform project that Kemal Derviş, Minister of Economic Affairs in the Ecevit government, guided before AKP came to power. It is important to note, however, that the impressive array of political changes since 2003 have been the work of the AKP. The party is responsible for forging a more democratic, more modern, more pluralist Turkey, thereby moving the country closer to the European Union and within reach of Atatürk's dream of "raising Turkey to the level of civilization." As positive as these changes are, they nevertheless present both Europe and the United States with critical, yet different policy challenges.

### **Europe: Confronting the Unexpected**

It is fair to say that at the 1999 meeting of the European Council in Helsinki, none of the Europeans actually expected Turkey to be able to pursue far-reaching institutional change in such a short period of time. Now that Turkey and the EU are involved in formally negotiating Ankara's membership, Europe is confronted with the vexing question of whether it wants to integrate a country of 74 million people who are overwhelmingly Muslim and, on average, significantly poorer than most EU citizens.

Although the European Commission recommended that Europe formally begin negotiating Turkey's entry into the Union in October 2004, Ankara's transition is not complete. The Europeans are correct to point to a series of economic, foreign policy, and domestic political issues that raise important questions about Turkey's candidacy. On the economic front, beyond the well-developed and westernized cities of the Aegean coast and the capital Ankara, Turkey is a largely rural, agrarian, undeveloped coun-

try.<sup>1</sup> The Europeans fear that Turkish membership will lead to mass migration of Turks into other EU member states.

On the foreign policy front, the continuing conflict in Cyprus is a primary source of friction between Ankara and Brussels. Since AKP came to power, it has consistently sought to take a more flexible position regarding the conflict than previous governments. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül counseled Turkish Cypriots and their leaders to accept the so-called Annan Plan when it was put to a referendum in the spring of 2004. In the event, 66 percent of Turkish Cypriots voted for the plan whereas three quarters of Greek Cypriots voted “no.” From the perspective of Ankara, since then the EU has failed to live up to commitments made to Turkish Cypriots that would have helped them break their international isolation. This has thus led to a hardening of the Turkish position on Cyprus. As a result, Ankara refuses to fulfill its own commitments to the EU by barring Greek Cypriot air and sea traffic from Turkish ports.

On domestic politics, Europe maintains serious reservations about what Brussels perceives to be institutional shortcomings that compromise the quality of Turkey’s democratic practices. For example, Article 301 of the penal code limits freedom of expression and has been used to target those who question long-held orthodoxies related to Turkey’s Kurdish minority and Turkish culpability for the killing of 1.5 million Armenians in Anatolia during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Well-known figures such as Turkish Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk and the French-Turkish writer Elif Şafak have been prosecuted for “insulting Turkishness” under the provisions of Article 301. In addition, Europeans are concerned about the continuing human rights abuses in Turkish police stations and prisons.

There is also the matter of Kurdish cultural rights. In 2004, Turkey formally lifted its ban on radio and television broadcasts in Kurdish dialects as well as its prohibition on education in Kurdish. While Kurds have access to an array of television programs in their language, including on state-run Turkish Radio and Television, problems remain in access to Kurdish education. State education bureaucrats have used a sudden meticulous adherence to legal measures such as fire code violations in an effort to shut down schools providing instruction about Kurdish culture in Kurdish language, thereby achieving political ends by alternative means.

Finally, the EU continues to criticize the role of the military establishment in Turkey’s political system. The Turks deserve credit for making significant changes that provide parliament with greater oversight over the military budget and downgrade the influence of the once seemingly all-powerful military-dominated *Milli Güvenlik Kurulu* (National Security Council). Yet, the Turkish General Staff retains the capacity to influence politics and maintains its self-endowed right to intervene directly in the political arena should the officers deem it necessary. Continuing prob-

<sup>1</sup> Turkey’s GDP per capita in 2006 was US\$5,400 as opposed to US\$29,000 per capita GDP for EU countries.

lems in civil-military relations were on full display in April 2007 when the military interfered in Turkey's scheduled presidential election. The General Staff, who issued a public ultimatum to the AKP government stating that there would be consequences should its candidate Abdullah Gül be elected, precipitated a constitutional crisis and intensified the perennial *kulturkampf* between Turkey's secularists and Islamists. Gül was ultimately elected president after a four-month delay and a demonstration of AKP's political power when it scored 47 percent of the vote in parliamentary elections held in July. Nevertheless, the military's actions in April raised real concerns about backsliding in Turkey's reform drive.

All of these concerns are valid, yet at the same time there are plausible resolutions to each of these issues. The greater problem, and the one left largely unsaid or to be communicated only indirectly, is the issue of faith. The central challenge for the EU is answering the first order question: Is Europe a Christian club or is it a union of countries that share common values, norms, and principles? To date, Europeans have not been able to agree upon an answer to this question. Nevertheless, it seems that most people within the EU, as well as the leaders of some of its most influential states (France's Nicolas Sarkozy and Germany's Angela Merkel, in particular), believe that there is no place for an overwhelmingly Muslim country in Europe.

There is no polling data suggesting that Europeans oppose Turkey's entry into the EU on outright religious grounds, though there are a variety of proxy indicators to conclude (as many Turks have done) that this is the case. For example, France plans to hold a referendum on Turkey's accession when the time comes for Ankara to sign an Accession Treaty – a measure that does not apply to any other EU applicant. In addition, a number of former members of the Soviet bloc, such as Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria, whose economic development lags Turkey and whose democratic traditions are suspect, have jumped ahead of Turkey in line to become members of Europe. Finally, the failed 2005 referendums in France and the Netherlands on the proposed EU constitutional treaty were largely regarded as a way of voicing the public's opposition to Turkey's membership.

There are three clear consequences of what seems to be Europe's rejection of Turkey on religious grounds. First, for the larger Muslim world, but particularly the Arab world, Turkey is a test case for how the West deals with the accumulation of Islamist political power in a Muslim society. If Turkey is left literally at the gates of Vienna, people and governments in the Middle East will perceive this as yet additional evidence that the West is hostile to Islam and Muslims. Second, the EU has been the anchor of Turkish reform. Given the structure of the Turkish political system, it is unlikely that the Turks could have undertaken significant reforms beginning in 2003 on their own. Indeed, Turkish leaders were very clear that they were pushing successive reform packages through the Grand National Assembly in order to meet European requirements. Without the incentives for change that the EU provides, the necessary widening and

deepening of Turkish democracy may not occur. Finally, it is likely that Turkey's failure to join the EU will produce an angry, insular, and nationalist society. This is not to suggest that Ankara will break its historic ties with NATO, but that it will be increasingly difficult for Europe (and the US) to achieve its interests in the Balkans, Caucuses, Middle East, and Central Asia without a Turkey that believes it is a full partner with the West.

### **The United States: Failing to Perceive Change**

The challenge for Washington emerging from Turkey is of an altogether different sort than the issues that Brussels confronts. Turkish foreign policy is changing, though it is less a function of the AKP and its ostensible Islamist agenda than three critical developments in and around Turkey and the international system over the last 15 years: first, the US invasion of Iraq has fundamentally altered the geo-strategic environment in Turkey's region; second, the increasing recognition that most of Europe does not want Turkey within the EU has led Turks to think either about strategic alternatives or to place emphasis on Turkey as a great power itself; and finally, with the disappearance of the Soviet threat, the primary issue that bound Turkey and the US together during the Cold War no longer exists. These structural changes, combined with the promises of greater policy-making transparency that AKP made when it came to office, have resulted in a more "normal" Turkish foreign policy.

Not only does public opinion matter more in Turkish foreign policy, Turkey's interests will also no longer necessarily coincide with those of the US. To be sure, Ankara and Washington share broad common goals in the stability of Iraq, Middle East peace, reconciliation in the Balkans, and energy policy. At the same time, however, the "normalization" of Turkish foreign policy will result in policies that the United States does not like. For example, just as Washington is seeking to isolate Tehran and Damascus, Ankara is developing ties with both countries. Indeed, the impetus that regime change in Iraq provided to Kurdish nationalism – an existential threat from Ankara's perspective – is driving the development of relations between Ankara and two previously troublesome neighbors, Tehran and Damascus, both of whom are also worried about a possible independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq. A more immediate challenge to all three countries is the problem of Kurdish terrorism. Turkey is under the most acute threat as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has increased the intensity of its attacks against Turkish forces along Turkey's border with Iraq. Both Syria and Iran have expressed solidarity with Turkey should Ankara decide to pursue PKK terrorists into Iraqi territory. The possibility of a Turkish military incursion is a grave concern for Washington, which fears a Turkish operation could undermine the relative stability of northern Iraq.

There is a tendency among some observers to attribute changes in Ankara's foreign policy to AKP's roots in Turkey's Islamist movement, specifically the *Milli Görüş* (National Outlook) movement, which sought closer

Turkish relations with the Muslim world at the expense of Turkey's Western orientation. This analysis prejudices the ostensible Islamism of the AKP. Given the structural changes in international politics that coincide roughly with the two wars against Iraq, it is clear that any Turkish government would be pursuing policies similar to those of the AKP. Moreover, if AKP were pursuing an Islamist agenda, it would not be seeking Turkey's entry into the EU.

Ultimately, Turkey's foreign policy is coming more into line with Atatürk's maxim of "Peace at home, peace in the world," which seeks good relations with all of its neighbors regardless of the character of their regimes. The great challenge for Washington is appreciating why this change in Turkish foreign policy is taking place while crafting a policy that takes advantage of the areas where the US shares interests with Turkey. Ankara literally sits at the geographic center of many of Washington's pressing foreign policy concerns. Turkey can play an important role in helping Washington achieve its interests, but only if the United States recognizes that as Turkey comes into its own as a political, economic, and diplomatic player, there will be differences between the two allies.

## The Role of Islamists in Post-Suharto Indonesia

*Felix Heiduk*

More than 80 percent of Indonesia's population of more than 200 million people is Muslim, making Indonesia the biggest Muslim majority country in the world. Since the fall of the authoritarian Suharto regime in 1998, Indonesia has made significant strides towards democracy. Indonesia's transition has been hampered by various problems, such as economic crisis and the pauperization of large parts of its population, the lingering corruption and nepotism of the Suharto-era, armed separatism, intra-communal conflicts between Muslims and Christians, and Islamist terrorism, to name but a few. Yet despite these challenges, the country has remained on course towards democracy. A majority of the population, as well as the country's political elite, regard the idea of an Islamic state as contradictory to Indonesia's democratization.

If the democratization process continues, Indonesia could become a role model for the compatibility of Islam and democracy. Yet insights from Indonesia's decade-long transition to democracy already have relevance for democracy promotion elsewhere in the Muslim world. This article analyzes the role Islamists have played in the context of Indonesia's democratization process. The main argument is twofold. First, policymakers in Europe and the US need to understand political Islam in the context of Indonesia's ongoing transition. Actors that impede the democratization process should not be considered strategic partners, regardless of whether they are found in the Islamist camp or the Indonesian state. This argument is especially valid for the Indonesian military, which has yet to undergo comprehensive reform. Second, policymakers need to abandon the tendency to consider secular forces as progressive and democratic, while considering Islamists backward and anti-democratic. Indonesia is one of the many examples to be found in this volume illustrating the importance of differentiating between various Islamist actors. With the exception of the militant fringe, Islamists have not significantly challenged Indonesia's transition. To the contrary, Islamist parties have often acted as "watch-dogs" seeking to safeguard political reforms rather than forestalling them. The contribution concludes with an assessment of recent American and European policies towards Indonesia's Islamists, examining prospects for a shared agenda and the form it could take.

### **Background: Islam and Politics in Indonesia**

After Indonesia gained independence from Dutch colonial rule in 1949, the main axis of conflict ran between Islamist and secular forces over the question of whether Indonesia should become an Islamic state. Islamist

forces favored the inclusion of the *sharia* into the Indonesian constitution in what came to be known as the Jakarta Charter. Secular forces, amongst them Indonesia's first president Sukarno, feared that an Islamic constitution would lead to the breakup of the newly independent state through the secession of mainly Christian eastern provinces. These fears tipped the scales in favor of a constitution that excluded the Jakarta Charter. This led to local uprisings in parts of Sumatra, Java, and Sulawesi with the goal of establishing an Islamic state (*Negara Islam*), but all of them were crushed by the central government. In the generally free and fair elections of 1956, secular parties led by nationalists and communists won a majority of the vote. After Suharto came to power through a military coup in 1965, political Islam was even further marginalized as all opposition forces were either co-opted into Suharto's "*ordre baru*" (New Order) or effectively oppressed. From the late 1980s onwards, however, Suharto began turning towards Islam to legitimate his increasingly unstable authoritarian regime. During the late 1990s Suharto even tried to co-opt Islamist forces and turn them against the emerging pro-democratic reform movement.

The fall of Suharto in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis created a political opening for a variety of Islamist actors. These ranged from terrorist groups such as *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI) and Islamist militias, to political parties such as the Prosperity and Justice Party (PKS). Their political goals were diverse, ranging from fighting "vice" at the local level, through to more ambitious projects for the establishment of a *Negara Islam*, or even JI's professed objective of an Islamic caliphate in Southeast Asia. While personal and organizational ties do exist amongst various Islamist actors in Indonesia, the militant fringe of political Islam is considered to be isolated from moderate Islamists. A terrorist group such as JI, for example, is said to have little connection to Indonesia's political establishment, including the Islamist PKS party.

### Dimensions of Post-Suharto Islamism

Ten years after Indonesia began its transition, most analysts regard Indonesia's democracy as stable, despite shortcomings such as political corruption. The free and fair elections of 1999 and 2004 were milestones, showing that all actors within the pluralist political system have accepted democracy as the only game in town, including Islamist parties. Strikingly, the transition to democracy has not led to an Islamization of the political landscape. Political parties that support the implementation of *sharia* law, whether openly or not, managed to win about 20 percent of the votes during the 1999 and 2004 national elections, while secular or moderate Muslim parties won a majority of the votes. Accordingly, in 2003, draft laws to establish *sharia* law at the national level failed to gain approval in parliament.

The remarkable rise of the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired PKS in 2004 surprised many observers. While the party did not even gain 2 percent of the vote in 1999, it managed to win more than 7 percent in 2004, making

the PKS Indonesia's seventh strongest party. Since 2004, the party has been part of the ruling coalition of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. But the rise of the PKS does not appear to be a sign of creeping Islamization. Close analysis of the last national elections shows that the PKS won many votes through an agenda focused on governance issues, including demands for greater transparency, social reforms, and anti-corruption policies. Even some non-Muslims voted for PKS due to its "clean" image. In contrast, the establishment of *sharia* law was not on the party's agenda.

The paradoxical lesson is that Islamist parties seem to gain more votes with an agenda focused on governance rather than religion. The 2007 local elections provided further evidence of this. Opinion polls showed that the PKS lost votes in Jakarta due to fears that the party might establish *sharia*-style bylaws in the city. These fears were precipitated by a shift within the PKS towards a more "religious" agenda prior to the elections. Public opinion polls show flagging support for political Islam in general. Only 9 percent of the population, versus 20 percent in 2004, currently supports a larger role for Islam in government.<sup>1</sup> PKS support in polls at the national level also declined from 8 percent in 2004 to just 2.5 percent currently.<sup>2</sup> Another poll showed that whereas 43 percent of Indonesians would vote for secular parties, only 5 percent would vote for Islamist parties, with the rest of the population opting for moderate Muslim parties.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Islamist terrorism in Indonesia has recently suffered severe setbacks. The *amir* (leader) of JI, the organization's military commander, and numerous other members were arrested during the spring and summer of 2007. During these operations, large caches of weapons and explosives were found by the police, further weakening JI's military capabilities. Many observers believe that future large-scale terror attacks might be committed by autonomous cells with few – if any – organizational ties to established groups like JI.

Another important threat to democratization is communal conflict, a source of militant Islamism in Indonesia overshadowed by the focus on JI. Recent reports point to serious violence in the conflict-torn provinces of the Moluccas, and especially in Poso, Sulawesi. Both the Moluccas and Sulawesi have witnessed almost a decade of clashes between Christian and Muslim militias. JI and other radical Islamist groups have used the conflicts to mobilize, recruit and train. Weak law enforcement makes the Moluccas and Sulawesi attractive for fugitives from other parts of the archipelago.

In general, however, radical Islamist parties and the violent fringe of political Islam appear to have been weakened. There seems to be no prospect of any party or actor becoming powerful enough to fragment Indonesia or transform it into an Islamic state. Yet Islamist policies in Indonesia seem to be shifting away from "hard politics" towards focusing on society

1 Ary Hermawan, "Gloomy outlook for Islamist parties," *The Jakarta Post* (online), 16 October 2006.

2 "Islam and Politics in Indonesia," *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 October 2006.

3 Ary Hermawan, "Gloomy outlook for Islamist parties," *The Jakarta Post*, 16 October 2006.

and the propagation of morals. Evidence of this trend assumes a variety of forms, including actions against “vice” carried out by various Islamist militia groups like the *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI, or Defenders of Islam Front); the establishment of local *sharia*-style bylaws in more than 10 percent of the Indonesian districts; judicial action against beliefs or practices that “insult Islam” by local courts; and the growing popularity of *pesantren* (religious boarding schools) and Islamic study groups on campuses all over Indonesia.

### Government and Islamist Actors in Post-Suharto Indonesia

In line with the observation that Islamism in post-Suharto Indonesia involves many different actors and strategies, the relationship between the government and Islamist actors encompasses cooperation, cooptation and repression. In contrast to the Suharto-era, where Suharto and his cronies dominated politics, post-Suharto Indonesia is marked by a competition for power between various political and economic elites. Islamist organizations can be instrumental in this politics, depending on their legal status, structure, goals, and relationship with the political establishment. The PKS and other legal Islamist parties are part of Indonesia’s pluralist political system and operate free from special restrictions. Indeed, the PKS is part of the ruling coalition of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, in addition to holding positions in local governments across the archipelago. The various coalitions formed between Islamist and secular parties illustrate the de facto inclusion of the former in the political establishment of post-Suharto Indonesia. Moderate religious actors, especially Indonesia’s Muslim mass organizations, such as the modernist *Mohammadiya* and the traditionalist *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), both of which have memberships numbered in millions, also play important roles. Both provide welfare and education and have played a vital part in Indonesia’s democratization process by balancing against more radical Islamist organizations. At the same time, conservative religious groups have become more influential. In July 2005, for example, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Indonesia’s top clerical body, comprised of a broad range of religious groups like *Mohammadiya* and NU, issued *fatwas* declaring liberalism and pluralism as forbidden and condemning inter-faith prayers and marriages.

Nevertheless, a majority of the population, including Islamists that regard terror attacks as harmful to the cause of establishing an Islamic state, supports the government’s heavy-handed repression of militant groups like JI and its alleged supporters. While few if any operational links exist between the legal political establishment and Islamist terrorism, the relationship between the political establishment and Islamist militia groups like the FPI is more opaque. Islamist militias often act in a grey zone between repression and cooptation. As long as their “street politics” are useful to local elites, for example in suppressing “un-Islamic” democracy activists, they benefit from significant support and operate with relative impunity. The disbandment of such paramilitary groups seems

highly unlikely for the time being, as nearly all political parties command their own militia groups for protection and extortion (the PKS being a rare exception).

One should not mistake the “secular” agendas of many Islamists with a depoliticization of Islam. When elected into government, Islamist parties like the PKS do demonstrate Islamic attitudes towards their constituencies, as for example through the implementation of *sharia*-style bylaws requiring that women wear the *hijab* (headscarf). But such policies are often implemented with the support of “secular” parties like the former Suharto-party *Golkar*. The adoption of *sharia*-style bylaws has become a strategy used by local politicians to mobilize political support, as parties that support the adoption of *sharia* regulations are seen as more credible providers of public services and good governance by their constituencies.

### European and US Approaches Towards Islamism in Indonesia

EU and US approaches are shaped by differences in strategic paradigms and power positions in the region. For the EU, Indonesia is first and foremost a trade partner. The EU is Indonesia’s second largest trading partner after Japan. Trade and economics have therefore shaped the policies of the EU and its member states towards Indonesia. Yet the rise of militant Islamism after the fall of Suharto has gained more attention in recent years – especially after the Bali bombings. The EU supports various projects in the fields of poverty reduction, conflict resolution, and counter-terrorism in order to consolidate Indonesian democracy. Whereas the EU has become active in the field of conflict resolution through the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) in support of the Aceh peace process, its counter-terrorism measures consist only of indirect contributions, for example providing technical assistance for the prevention of money laundering as a source for terrorist financing. Furthermore, many EU member states have tried, in cooperation with the Indonesian government, to establish inter-faith dialogues with various actors ranging from civil society organizations like *Mohammadiya* to the PKS. Nevertheless, coherence is lacking in EU policy.

The post-1945 security architecture of Southeast Asia has been structured as a “hub-and-spoke” system comprising a variety of bilateral alliances and agreements between the US and many Southeast Asian states, effectively making the US as an external power the centre of Southeast Asia’s security architecture. The US therefore sees Indonesia in a different strategic paradigm. After the Bali bombings, Southeast Asia became the “second front” in the global war on terror, and Indonesia *the* key regional partner for the US. The US actively supports the improvement of Indonesia’s counter-terrorism capacities. For example, the US supported the creation of a counter-terrorism police unit, *Detachmen 88*, which played a major role in the recent arrests of top *JI* figures. In 2005 the US even resumed full ties with the Indonesian military in order to bolster its capabilities in the “war on terror” – ties that were cut for years due to its

involvement in massacres in East Timor throughout the 1990s. There are also a variety of programs run by organizations like USAID directed at combating the root causes of Islamist militancy in the country through support for good governance, poverty eradication, civil society development and conflict mitigation. More recently, USAID has initiated inter-faith dialogues with representatives of moderate Islamist organizations, including civic education programs in cooperation with local mosques.

So far, the EU and the US do not share an agenda in military terms, mainly due to the lack of European capabilities in the region. To the extent that they share interests, these are dominated by the common assumption that Islamist militancy must be tackled at its roots, i.e. poverty, the absence of religious tolerance, simmering communal conflicts, and dysfunctional and corrupt governance. These problems all concern Indonesia's transition to democracy and socio-economic development. While current approaches premised on development, good governance, and peace building might be successful in tackling some of the root causes of Islamist militancy, the US, the EU, and European governments require a more coherent and balanced policy towards political Islam in Indonesia. A shared agenda supporting Indonesia's democratic transition needs to avoid bias. Opposing democratically elected Islamists while engaging the Indonesian military, an organization known for its poor human rights record, will only deepen the distrust of Indonesia's Muslim communities. The fact that "western" policies towards Islamists often seem to be at odds with the West's own norms plays into the hands of anti-democratic forces in Indonesia and is therefore counter-productive in terms of the country's democratization.

## **The Use and Abuse of Islam in Framing Conflicts and Policies**



## Islam and Symbolic Politics in Somalia

Annette Weber

In the winter of 2007, the current civil war in Somalia is entering its second year.<sup>1</sup> However, the collapse of public order and the evaporation of the rule of law in the war torn society started even before the fall of the last Somali president, Siad Barre, in 1991. For most of the seventeen stateless years since then, warlords have controlled the territory and economy of Somalia. Militia factions have only provided clan security locally. Basic state functions have been non-existent or privatized in the hands of sub-clan militias. In mid-2006, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) took control in Somalia. By December 2006, however, they were ousted in a military intervention launched by neighboring Ethiopia to secure the stability of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Since the intervention, more than 400,000 people have fled the capital due to heavy fighting and deteriorating security. The intervention has led to polarization between clans. Those that feel excluded from power, such as the Hawiye clan, have joined insurgents fighting both Ethiopian forces and the weak Somali government.

The conflict in Somalia is multileveled. The domestic causes of conflict lie in the disastrous fragmentation of warlord fiefdoms, the absence of a state, the mushrooming of criminal networks, and repression of the population by warlords, factions of the Islamic Courts movement, and the TFG. None of the parties, including neither the TFG nor the UIC, have presented a political program for creating a functioning government. Beyond Somalia, a main factor in the war is the power struggle between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The absence of a legitimate government in Somalia facilitates this proxy war. Regional interests – economic, political and ideological – are played out in Somalia, relatively unhindered by a functional Somali state or other international actors. The civil war in Somalia thus increases the extant polarization in the Horn of Africa. This has regional implications far beyond Somalia. The states that identify as Christian in the region, such as Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Southern Sudan's autonomous government, stand on the side of the TFG and receive support and military backing from the US. In turn, Sudan and Eritrea, along with Egypt and other Muslim majority states in the region, support the UIC.

Surprisingly, the conflict has been framed as having a religious component by Ethiopia, the TFG, and the UIC. Islam, although not a decisive political factor in Somalia so far, has become part of a larger game of symbolic politics. There has been a significant increase in Islamist rhetoric

<sup>1</sup> Somalia here refers to the southwest, without Somaliland or Puntland. Somaliland declared itself an independent state after the fall of Siad Barre in 1991, but has not been recognized by any other country. Puntland declared its autonomous status in 1998.

with less of an emphasis on problems specific to Somalia. For both sides, appeals to Islam have become a unifying and mobilizing force. The UIC rallies behind Islam as a legitimizing force to engage in a jihad against infidels and occupying forces, while the TFG uses it to legitimize its intervention and stabilize its position vis-à-vis “the Islamists” by framing Somalia’s conflict in terms of the war on terror.

In order to deescalate the conflict in Somalia and beyond, it is necessary to promote a rights-based approach that is inclusive and secures public space for political actors, civil society, and ordinary citizens alike to voice their positions. Local governance needs to be strengthened and moderate members of the UIC should be engaged in building an inclusive and representative government. At the same time, building state institutions to provide a framework for governance is imperative. However, conflict transformation processes have to be owned by the people of Somalia in order to be sustainable.

### **The Use and Abuse of Islam**

Somalia is a religiously homogenous country, with a population that is 98 percent Muslim. Sufi practices and worldly Sunni rituals dominate Islam in Somalia. Religion was traditionally a framework to seek guidance and spiritual enlightenment. However, historically, Islam did also play a role in the political field. Dervish movements and Sufi brotherhoods were sources of resistance against various colonial regimes. Since the collapse of the state, there has been a massive influx of Wahhabi charities. Radical elements in the Islamic Courts have found an interested audience in the otherwise neglected and desperate population. Now there are more and more Quranic recitation schools (*madrassas*) and public health services provided by religious entities. Yet the warlord system has been based on oligopolies of violence that disregard religion, and Islamist movements have never managed to overrule the tight grasp of the warlords over the past 17 years.

One earlier group with an Islamist agenda, the *Al Ittihad al Islamiya* (AIAI, or Islamic Union), founded in the mid-1980s, became a strong force with links to Sudan’s chief Islamist, Hassan al Turabi, and to the Arab World in general. AIAI was officially defeated in a battle with forces under the command of the current president, Abdullahi Yussuf, in the mid-1990s. But one of the strongmen of AIAI, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, became a rising star with the Islamic Courts as speaker and leader of its radical wing. Both the organization and its leader Sheikh Aweys appear on the terrorist list of the US State Department.

There is evidence of Al Qaeda members operating in Somalia. Attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, and on a hotel and airline frequented by Israeli visitors in Mombassa in 2002, were undertaken after preparation in Somalia. However, there is no evidence of continuously functional Al Qaeda cells and networks. Due to the tightly knit clan network, clandestine operations are almost impossible. Lately, using

Ethiopia's occupation as a mobilizing factor, various Al Qaeda members have used websites to rally jihadis to come fight in Somalia.<sup>2</sup> As the polarization and the abuse of religion by all actors involved in Somalia gains momentum, there is a high possibility that Al Qaeda will take advantage of the jihadist agenda of the Shabab, the UIC's zealous armed wing fighting Ethiopian forces.

The use and abuse of Islam by political actors, domestically, regionally and internationally, became most apparent during 2006, which witnessed the UIC's victory over the CIA-sponsored Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter Terrorism (ARPCT). In the perception of Ethiopia and many western states, the UIC followed an Islamist, irredentist, and jihadist agenda. In contrast, for a substantial proportion of the Somali population, the courts were the first movement to bring a modicum of order to the war-torn country. Nonetheless, some court leaders alienated the Somali population by enforcing Islamic modes of behavior, e.g. by prohibiting Bollywood movies, public screenings of the World Cup matches, chewing *qat* and wearing dresses rather than *hijabs*.

In the course of 2006, radicals in the court, such as Sheik Aweys, the head of AIAI, and Aden Ayro, the leader of the military wing, Shabab, became dominant within the movement and acted as the spokespersons for what was in reality a heterogeneous assemblage of courts. The split in the UIC between radicals and moderates, and between jihadists and nationalists, became even more apparent after the Ethiopian invasion. Radical court members fled the country and found refuge in Eritrea and Yemen while the majority of the court leaders simply merged back into local clan structures, showing how tightly knit the links are between the clans and the courts.

Prior to the invasion, and in its aftermath, there has been little evidence that the TFG is committed to the population that it claims to govern. On 29 October 2007, Prime Minister Gedi, the only Hawiye clan member in a higher political position, resigned after being accused of incompetence and blamed for the deterioration of security in Mogadishu. However, using Gedi, a close Ethiopian ally, as the scapegoat for what goes wrong in Somalia will not solve the problems facing the TFG. Following his resignation, violence in Mogadishu escalated and another 80,000 people fled the capital in the last week of October 2007.

Ostracizing the courts as well as the Hawiye, a powerful clan, creates a mobilization factor for jihadists not yet seen in Somalia. A new alliance, the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS), which combines dissident TFG ministers, the Somali Diaspora, politicians, and intellectuals, might provide new momentum and a broader basis for what remains of the UIC. Whereas part of the ARS aims to become a political movement presenting the international community with a broader alternative to the hapless TFG or the radical Shabab, another branch, connected to Sheikh

<sup>2</sup> Zawahiri calls for attacks on Ethiopian forces in Somalia ([www.globalsecurity.org/security/profiles/zawahiri\\_calls\\_for\\_attacks\\_on\\_ethiopian\\_forces\\_in\\_somalia.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/profiles/zawahiri_calls_for_attacks_on_ethiopian_forces_in_somalia.htm)). Accessed on 20 October 2007.

Hassan Aweys, plans to “re-liberate” Somalia from Ethiopian occupation. In early October 2007, Islamic Court militias captured the town of Bu’aaale in southern Somalia, close to the Kenyan border. According to media information, one of Al Qaeda’s Eastern Africa members, Abu Taha al Sudani, was involved in the fighting.

### **The International Response**

For the last 17 years, Somalia has been a juridical entity without a functional government. There have been fourteen attempts to solve the political crisis, mainly by the regional organization Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). In 2004, the TFG was formed in Kenya. It remained there until pushed by Kenyan authorities to relocate to Baidoa, Somalia, in 2005, waiting until security conditions improved in Mogadishu. On 14 June 2006, the UIC took control after toppling the CIA-supported grouping of warlords, the ARPCT. In December 2006, the TFG called on the Ethiopian government to help them against the UIC, which by then controlled most of the country and moved to attack Baidoa, the seat of the TFG. With the political and military backing of the US, Ethiopian troops overran UIC positions in a matter of days. Insurgents, whose ranks consist of UIC members and Hawiye clan militia, have since waged a guerrilla war against Ethiopian forces and the weak military forces of the interim government.

The formation of the TFG has been fully supported, financed, and facilitated by the international community, including the EU. All EU statements therefore refer to the TFG as the legitimate government, as do UN Security Council resolutions, African Union (AU) communiqués, and IGAD position papers. On 20 February 2007, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1744, authorizing a six-month African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) to support the TFG. Eight thousand troops were envisioned, but only 1,600 Ugandan troops were on the ground in fall 2007. But survival rather than peacekeeping seems to be the main aim of the Ugandan soldiers, who control only the harbor and part of the airport. The General Secretary of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, gave a gloomy evaluation of the impact of the mission and the future situation when calling for a “Coalition of the Willing” for Somalia. He said a UN peacekeeping mission would be neither realistic nor viable given the security situation in Somalia and observed that neither the AU mission nor the heavy Ethiopian presence could stabilize the situation.

One mechanism for mediating the conflicts in Somalia was the Somalia Contact Group, established in June 2006.<sup>3</sup> Whereas there is a unified position in the EU on the need to have an inclusive government in Somalia, there are vast policy differences on these issues with the US administration. The Contact group supported a reconciliation conference

<sup>3</sup> The International Somalia Contact Group includes the EU (Presidency and European Commission), Italy, Kenya, Norway, Sweden, Tanzania, United Kingdom, and the US, with the AU, IGAD, the League of Arab States, and the United Nations.

in which the TFG was expected to include moderate court members and Hawiye clan representatives. Only some Hawiye were included, but not those with political influence, and no UIC members joined the conference. The reconciliation conference took place from 15 July to 30 August 2007 in Mogadishu and ended with no tangible result. Insurgent attacks increased during the conference despite a truce with some Hawiye elders, as the TFG was accused of being exclusive.

### **International Confusion**

Somalia is placed at a geo-strategically important position between the Horn of Africa and the Arab peninsula. Historically this needle eye meant good trade connections and relative prosperity. For the last decade or so Somalia was known as a chaotic warlord-run state, feared for its pirates. Smugglers of drugs, electronics and weapons use the ports and airports in Somalia, controlled by warlord businessmen who practice clan-feudalism, bound by neither national taxation nor international law.

The failure of the international community during the US and UN interventions from 1992 to 1995 became a decisive factor in the subsequent reluctance to intervene in Africa. This failure has had multiple sources. Though humanitarian agencies were relatively successful in distributing aid and alleviating widespread famine, military forces cooperated selectively with warlord factions and came to be seen by local actors as an occupation force. The missions have left Somalia in the lawless state of warlord rule. The Somalia experience, and the Black Hawk Down incident in particular, left the US traumatized. The consequences of this humiliating failure led the US government to abjure intervention in African countries, ultimately leading to the horrific failure to deal with genocide in Rwanda in 1994.

Since September 11, Somalia has ranked high on the list of countries where the US sees the imperative to fight the “war on terror.” For the US government, Somalia’s statelessness and the absence of rule of law pose threats reminiscent of Al Qaeda’s Afghanistan sanctuary. At the same time, the lack of a real state allows the US military to directly target Somalia’s territory without fear of reprisal or international condemnation. Operation Enduring Freedom – Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA), part of the US military’s response to the attacks of September 11, is based in neighboring Djibouti. From the perspective of OEF’s military leaders, Somalia is seen as a breeding ground for Al Qaeda operatives. The US thus supports Ethiopia through the exchange of military intelligence as well as in its broader competition with Eritrea. Currently the US administration threatens to list Eritrea as a state sponsor of terrorism due to the supply of weapons and training for UIC militias, including the Shabab. Whereas Ethiopia enjoys the full support of the US, including military training in spite of human rights atrocities committed by the Ethiopian forces in Somalia and Ethiopia’s Ogaden, the US is categorical in its condemnation of Eritrea.

These policies lack the support of other international actors, namely the EU, AU, and the Arab League. European actors do not share a common agenda with the US regarding Somalia. There are diverse relations and interests informing EU member state policies. In the absence of a comprehensive European policy, the EU has failed to engage the US government in a critical dialogue. While the EU appears to be united behind a more proactive engagement with Eritrea to counter its isolation by the US, there is no outspoken criticism of Ethiopia. Human rights abuses and atrocities committed by Ethiopian troops in Somalia and the Ogaden are not condemned, leaving the impression that the West is obliged to keep quiet because it is thankful for Ethiopia's military presence in Somalia. Cases of rendition by Ethiopian and CIA personnel are documented; however no international or European reaction has been registered. The continuation of a culture of impunity does not give hope for positive developments in Somalia.

### **Stabilizing Somalia**

A common interest of the US and the EU is the stabilization of the Horn of Africa. Somalia – as a centre of gravity in regional conflicts – cannot be sidelined and needs a political settlement to its conflicts. Somalia needs multileveled support to reconcile social groups and to build a framework for state functions that allows the Somali people to negotiate their political differences. The policy of the US, the EU, and its member state governments, should be based on universal rights, not on cultural and religious preferences. The US policy of focusing on a military solution in Somalia is not sustainable. Somalia's domestic power dynamics need to be considered as much as Somalia's role in the proxy war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the broader "war on terror." Indeed, the tendency to confuse Islam, terror, and Islamism has impeded the formulation of a response to Somalia's complex crisis.

The international community, including the UN, the AU, and the Arab League, should continue to call for inclusive negotiations, including those Islamists who refrain from violence, as well as clan representatives sidelined because of their proximity to radical courts. The AU and the Arab League could and should play a proactive role in facilitating negotiations with moderate members of the UIC. Meanwhile, the donor community should encourage institution and state building efforts along with a system of transparent benchmarks based on good governance and human rights. Benchmarks would provide a transitional government with a framework for action and allow the donor community to harmonize efforts to improve security in the short-term and build institutions over the long term. It is also of utmost importance to rebuild a judiciary and to support mechanisms of transitional justice to end the culture of impunity.

Because the conflict in Somalia has such enormous regional implications, it is essential to tackle it with a regional approach. Somalia will not be stabilized without a change in policy vis-à-vis Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Germany, with no former colonial history in this region, is respected by many regional governments and could therefore seek a more proactive role in bridging contested EU positions and communicating them as a united EU position vis-à-vis governments in the region. Germany could play a role as an intermediary in the region, using Germany's access to the Arab League, the AU, and IGAD countries to facilitate talks between the warring parties.

## The Conflicts in Sudan: American and European Policies

Dorina A. Bekoe

Insurgencies have arisen in three main regions of Sudan: Southern Sudan, Darfur, and Eastern Sudan. While the specific causes of war for each region differ, there are important commonalities that show a pattern of political, economic, and social marginalization in Sudan. The roots of Sudan's conflicts stretch back several hundred years, and lie in the domination of the north, namely the government in Khartoum, over other non-Arab groups; in poor governance and administration; and in identity issues. These patterns of interaction persist today and have transformed themselves into religious and cultural fissures in the country. US and EU policies have only dealt with Sudan's conflicts in recent times. For the US in particular, Sudan policy has mostly reflected efforts to stop the spread of communism during the Cold War, and the spread of religious extremism following the September 11 attacks. When Sudan's wars have been addressed, the root causes have oftentimes been simplified or glossed over, overlooking the mutually reinforcing nature of the grievances. This contribution reviews the major conflicts in Sudan and the foreign policy responses of the US and EU to both the Government of Sudan and its conflicts.

### Southern Sudan

The modern conflict between Khartoum and Southern Sudan is usually considered to have begun shortly before independence with a mutiny by southern soldiers against the north in 1955, but the sources of the conflict date back at least to the 1820s. The Egyptian conquest of Sudan encouraged the exploitation of the south by the northern regions in order to promote commerce and sustain the Egyptian empire. Northern and Southern Sudan had effectively been ruled and developed as two separate entities, divided by religion, wealth and resources. Islam and Arab culture came to dominate Sudan through the trading relationships between Arabs and northern Sudanese, and the British Empire's policy of investing disproportionately more in the north.

As such, the Sudanese government's central goal at independence was national unity. The uncertainty rested on what the unifying factors would be. While the north saw Islam as a unifying attribute, the south felt that the imposition of Islam would not differ much from the imposition of colonialism.<sup>1</sup> Forced Arabization and resistance to Islam thus became the defining features of north-south relations after independence. In 1969,

<sup>1</sup> Francis M. Deng, *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan* (Washington, DC, The Brookings Institution, 1994), p 21.

Jaafar Muhammed Numeiri's coup sought to reverse the policies of Arabization, which led to a peace agreement with southern rebels in 1972. However, Numeiri's increasingly conservative Islam resulted in the unraveling of the Addis Ababa Agreement and a resumption of hostilities in 1983. Numeiri's overthrow in 1985 did not improve relations between the north and south. Finally in 1989, a military coup brought Omar Hassan Ahmed El-Bashir and Hassan al Turabi's National Islamic Front (NIF) to power, resulting in an attempt to impose Islam more aggressively throughout the country. The new drive to unify the country under Islam and Arab culture entrenched rifts between the two regions, which had by then transformed the conflict to include racial and cultural divisions between not only the north and south, but between the north and the other regions as well.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), signed in January 2005, calls for greater wealth and power distribution between the north and south and provides a measure of autonomy for the south. The CPA ushered in the Government of National Unity (GNU), comprising the ruling National Congress Party and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), and permits the Government of Southern Sudan to administer the south. In 2011, according to the timetable of the CPA, southerners are supposed to vote in a referendum on independence. Presently, however, the CPA remains largely unimplemented. Although the CPA deals explicitly with the grievances of Southern Sudan, its broad framework of wealth and power sharing, and inclusion of minority cultures, serves as a viable approach to address the sources of conflict in Sudan's other regions. Thus, the lag in implementation of the CPA is also a strike against the credibility of the government's commitments to abide by agreements it signs with rebel groups in Darfur and eastern Sudan.

## Darfur

Since it was defeated and incorporated into the British Empire in 1916, Darfur has been marginal to Sudan. Under the British, Darfur did not enjoy the same level of economic and political investment as other regions; the British administration was mostly concerned with pacifying the region. After independence, Darfur did not fare much better under the Sudanese government, suffering continued political and economic neglect. The severe droughts of the 1970s and 1980s exacerbated the region's underdevelopment. Darfur became caught up in the Islamization and Arabization of Sudan when Khartoum began to favor groups of Arab-descent over Africans – in particular after the NIF, led by Hassan al Turabi, came to power. For example, a re-organization of Darfur into three states in the mid-1990s – North Darfur, West Darfur and South Darfur – resulted in making the non-Arab Fur, also the largest ethnic group, minorities in each of these states.<sup>2</sup> Arabs almost exclusively staffed the new administra-

<sup>2</sup> Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War* (New York: Zed Books, 2005), p 57f.

tive posts in the three Darfurian states, marking a concerted effort by the NIF to Arabize and Islamicize the country. The disenfranchisement of non-Arab groups added to tensions that were already simmering after the severe drought of 1985-86 pitted nomadic pastoralists (frequently Arabs) against farmers (frequently non-Arabs) in the competition for resources. To clamp down on the growing armed resistance of non-Arabs, the government of Sudan armed local militia groups. By 2003, when the world came to know of Darfur, these groups had transformed into the infamous *Janjaweed*.

However, the grievances in Darfur do not simply suggest animosity between Arabs and Africans. Indeed, the first rebel attack of the modern conflict in Darfur was staged by a Fur-Zaghawa alliance.<sup>3</sup> The Zaghawa, who had previously formed an alliance with the Arabs, agreed to an alliance with the Fur because of their disappointment with government services and support to Darfur and a commitment to fight Arab domination. The Zaghawa-Fur alliance thus reveals the complexity of the conflict in Darfur. While there is an element of Arab-African conflict, the grievances reflect a deeper reality of political marginalization.

Since 2003, experts estimate that more than 200,000 people have died in the fighting in Darfur and two million have been displaced. In May 2006, the armed factions in Darfur were brought to Abuja to negotiate a peace agreement. Only one group, the Minni Minawi faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement, signed the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). Since then, Darfur's rebels have splintered into approximately twelve new groups and the DPA remains unimplemented. The latest attempt to negotiate a peace agreement between the rebels and the Government of Sudan has faltered, as the main rebel groups refused to attend peace talks in Sirte, Libya. Continuing instability in Darfur will delay the start of the census, which in turn may affect the date of the general elections, currently scheduled for July 2009.

### Eastern Sudan

Eastern Sudan, which comprises the three states of Gedarif, Kassala, and Red Sea, is home to the Beja, the majority ethnic group, along with the Rashaida, and other smaller groups from Darfur and West Africa. Sudan's only port is located in Eastern Sudan, making the region strategic for Sudan's oil economy. Inhabitants of eastern Sudan have long suffered from political, economic and cultural marginalization. The Beja Congress, formed in 1958, sought redress for these issues through political means at first, but turned to armed conflict in 1993 when they were effectively shut out of the political process by the NIF's 1989 ban on political parties. In 2004, the Beja Congress joined with the Rashaida Free Lions, which was established in 1999 to protest political disenfranchisement, to form the

<sup>3</sup> Julie Flint and Alex de Waal, *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War* (New York: Zed Books, 2005), p 73.

Eastern Front (EF). The conflict in the east has always been one of low intensity, though there were significant events, such as the killing of 22 protestors by government security forces at Port Sudan.

In October 2006, the East Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) was signed. Modeled after the CPA, it promised increased wealth and power sharing, and importantly, a US\$600 million development fund for the east. More than one year later, the ESPA has made progress in demobilizing the EF and with a number of political appointments, but key aspects remained unfulfilled. In particular, the development fund has not received its first transfer of US\$100 million and a reconciliation conference has yet to be scheduled.

These three major armed conflicts are linked by the politics of exclusion practiced by Khartoum. In each case, inhabitants of the regions have been marginalized through religious exclusion, economic neglect or ethnic domination. The CPA explicitly addresses these grievances and thus holds the key to peace and reconciliation in Sudan. However, stability in Sudan is threatened by the inadequate implementation of the CPA, weakening the prospects of the other agreements to be fulfilled. The international community, in its efforts to seek a negotiated solution to the conflicts in Sudan, must acknowledge that stability will only be attained when the peripheral regions, and both non-Arab and non-Muslim groups, can participate more meaningfully in national politics and economic policy.

## US and EU Policy Toward Sudan

US policy toward Sudan is characterized by both continuity and change. Since the beginning of the Cold War, Sudan has been both an ally and a pariah state in US foreign policy. During the Cold War, the US supported Numeiri, who tried to cultivate a strong relationship with the US by portraying his government as anti-communist. From the US perspective, Sudan stood as a bulwark against the effects of Ethiopia's 1974 Marxist revolution. As a US ally in the Cold War, Sudan received significant amounts of economic and military aid. US policy collided with developments in the Sudanese domestic realm, where Numeiri was being challenged by hard-line Islamists who wanted to review the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, institute a more aggressive policy of Islamization, and impose *sharia* law. The conservative Sadiq al Mahdi overthrew Numeiri in 1985, and then Sadiq al Mahdi himself was deposed in the 1989 coup that brought Omar al Bashir to power.

The end of the Numeiri regime also marked the beginning of changes in the US relationship with Sudan. Bashir's administration adopted *sharia* and moved closer to Libya and Iran. The US worried that the introduction of *sharia* in Sudan would destabilize the region and harm US interests. Thereafter, relations between the two countries deteriorated steadily. Sudan's support of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the UN's citation of Sudan as a violator of human rights served as the key factors that altered US-Sudan relations. In 1993, the US designated Sudan as a state

sponsor of terrorism. This designation made Sudan ineligible for most American economic and military assistance, although it continued to receive humanitarian aid. Air and other diplomatic sanctions were imposed in 1996 following the attempted assassination of Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa; the alleged murderers were suspected of being harbored by the Sudanese government.<sup>4</sup> In 1997, Sudan was included in the Antiterrorism Act, which prohibits trade between US companies and states designated as supporters of terrorism. Finally, after the 1998 US embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam were alleged to have links to a pharmaceutical firm in Khartoum, the US launched air strikes that destroyed the facility. The passage of the Congressional International Religious Freedom Act (CIRF) in 1999 brought the religious element of the conflict into sharper focus. The conflict in Sudan, having attracted the interest of US religious organizations, began to be described in religious terms, with warnings that the Islamic government was dominating and enslaving Christian southerners. With the passage of the CIRF, the Sudanese government began to be cited as a gross violator of human rights.

Despite the fact that the EU did not impose the same range of sanctions on Sudan as the US (only arms trading was banned), the EU broke off formal relations with Sudan in 1990, citing the country's poor human rights record. It was about the same time that US-Sudan relations began to sour. But in 1999, the EU sought to normalize commercial relations through the African-Caribbean-Pacific-EU negotiations. This shift in EU policy clashed with pressure by European civil society to prohibit oil companies from doing business in Sudan.

US engagement with Sudan began to change again at the turn of the millennium, as Sudan began to cooperate with US counterterrorism efforts. However, the September 11 attacks altered US and EU policy toward Sudan very quickly – especially given that Osama bin Laden had lived in Sudan for a number of years before departing for Afghanistan in 1996. Sudan became at once a focal point and ally in the war on terror. After September 11, Sudan began to provide information on Al Qaeda to the US government. There was also increased pressure on Sudan to end the war with the South. In 2002, the EU pegged continued relations with Sudan to progress in securing a peace agreement with the South. After the CPA was signed, Sudan received €400 million in EU development support.

In the meantime, little attention was paid to the developing crisis in Darfur. Some claim that the US failure to address Darfur in 2003, when reports of atrocities first emerged, reflected the new complicated relationship between the US and Sudan: with Sudan providing information in the war on terror and a peace agreement imminent in the south, the US feared that addressing the conflict in Darfur would harm both objectives.<sup>5</sup> The ongoing war in Darfur has brought US and EU policies toward Sudan

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Sudan, Oil, and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, 2003), p 479f.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Abramowitz, "US Promises on Darfur Don't Match Actions," *Washington Post*, 29 October 2007.

closer, with combined pressure from both to end the violence. In light of the failed Darfur Peace Agreement, both the US and the EU support the implementation of a 26,000-strong UN hybrid force in Darfur combining UN and African Union forces. While it is scheduled to begin deploying in early 2008, Khartoum has imposed several conditions on the force's composition and mandate. Moreover, on both continents, civil society organizations have mounted large campaigns to shed light on the atrocities in Darfur and force stronger action by their governments. In contrast, the civil war in the East has not received much attention. Instead, Eritrea was the major external power that mediated the peace talks between the EF and the Sudanese government.

### **Alternate Concepts of the Conflict**

Neither the US nor the EU focused on ending Sudan's wars until relatively recently. When the US and EU did focus on ending the wars, the initial simplistic framing of the conflict as north versus south; Muslim versus Christian; Arab versus non-Arab ignored wider questions around the unequal distribution of wealth and power. Moreover, it obfuscated a more general pattern of Khartoum's marginalization of the regions in the hinterland – grievances that require political, not military solutions. Belatedly, these relationships are surfacing, as negotiators in eastern Sudan and Darfur have adopted the wealth and power sharing frameworks of the CPA.

In re-casting the conflicts in Sudan as part of similar center-periphery relations, attention must also turn to how land-use policy – such as the construction of the 200 kilometer long Merowe Dam in the Nile Valley of northern Sudan – fuels conflict and disenfranchises communities; how implementing peace agreements causes conflict and re-orders relationships between ethnic groups – as is occurring in eastern Sudan; and how to increase decentralization and transparency in policy decisions. In short, policies supporting peace efforts in Sudan must take account of the enormous complexity of the political and economic relationships in the country, and the need for a renegotiation of the social contract between the state and its citizens. More concretely, policymaking should be more consultative, reflect the religious and ethnic diversity of Sudan, live up to democratic ideals of pluralism and transparency, and ensure a more equitable distribution of the country's wealth.



# **Political Participation of Islamists in Authoritarian Systems**



## Authoritarian King and Democratic Islamists in Morocco

*Eva Wegner*

When formulating policies towards authoritarian regimes of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), external actors have to choose between supporting the incumbent regime – i.e. the authoritarian status quo – and promoting political reforms that will benefit opposition forces. The opposition generally includes not only secular forces, but also Islamists whose democratic credentials external actors often distrust. Nevertheless, in some countries, this choice poses less of a dilemma than in others. Morocco, a country with a highly pragmatic Islamist opposition party, is a case where external actors should opt in favor of political reforms. To date, such an approach has not been reflected in the policies of the EU, its member states, or the US. Both the EU and the US have pursued a policy supportive of Morocco's authoritarian regime. For instance, Morocco is among the main beneficiaries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and Europeans have limited themselves to supporting reforms initiated by the government. The US has increased its military and economic aid to Morocco since September 11. Where the EU and the US differ, however, is in their approach towards Islamists. Whereas the EU ignores them, the US increasingly treats the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD) like a legitimate opposition actor.

Given the moderate, pragmatic approach of the PJD, and its internal legitimacy with a broad Moroccan constituency, a convergence of European policy with the prevailing US approach towards the Islamists would benefit the interests of both. This convergence should, moreover, take place within the context of a broader push for political reforms and pressure on the Moroccan government to increase its respect for human rights.

### **Today's Moroccan Regime: A Less Repressive Autocracy**

The current Moroccan regime is indeed less repressive than most of its counterparts elsewhere in the MENA. Nevertheless, even after the political liberalization measures adopted by late King Hassan II in the 1990s, the King still dominates decision-making. There are no checks and balances to his power and no indications that the current King Mohamed VI is willing to relinquish any of his manifold prerogatives. Political liberalization in Morocco thus did not lead to a broader democratization process, but to regime stabilization. One effect, however, was that authoritarian rule now requires a lower degree of repression than in former times.

Two main reasons account for the successful stabilization of a less repressive autocracy. First, the reforms of the 1990s resulted in the inclusion of most former challengers to the King's legitimacy, both from the secular

and Islamist camp. Since 1998 secular opposition parties have been co-opted into government. One major current of the Islamist movement – the Movement of Unity and Reform – was also included into official politics by authorizing its electoral participation. The result is that none of these included actors is pressuring the monarchy to relinquish more control. Put simply, the Islamists fear that if they put too much pressure on the regime it may respond by outlawing them while the secular parties fear the electoral mobilization capacities of the Islamists. Second, reform of institutions governing political competition has allowed for the containment of the opposition within political institutions. One example is the electoral law, which disfavors big political parties and encourages the fragmentation of political forces. In the parliament elected in September 2007, there are 19 parties, out of which five have one seat and another five have less than five seats. The result of this fragmentation is a government coalition united not so much by a joint political program as by competition for the spoils of office and patronage. As a result, the coalition is highly susceptible to the King's interventions to arbitrate between competing parties.

As a result, further political opening in Morocco requires two preconditions. First, reform is tied to the ability of opposition parties to negotiate a change of existing rules with the palace. Second, opposition parties must concur amongst themselves regarding the type of reforms they want to negotiate. For external actors wanting to promote political reforms, this implies that they should provide resources to the opposition, including the Islamists.

### **The Party of Justice and Development**

In Morocco, the Islamist opposition is composed of two major groups: the Justice and Charity organization (al Adl wal Ihsan), and the Party of Justice and Development (PJD). The first of these, Sheikh Yassine's Justice and Charity organization, is barred from participation in political institutions. In part, its exclusion is self-imposed, as it refuses existing pre-conditions for political participation, namely, acceptance of both the religious legitimacy of the monarchy and its dominant role in politics.

The second major group in the Islamist opposition consists of the Movement of Unity and Reform (MUR) and the Party of Justice and Development (PJD). In contrast to Justice and Charity, this strand of the Islamist movement has accepted the preconditions on legal political action. Although the palace rejected the application of MUR leaders for the legalization of their own party, it tolerated the integration of several MUR members into a dormant political party, the Constitutional and Democratic Popular Movement (MPCD). This party, renamed the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) in 1998, has since participated in three national elections – in 1997, 2002, and 2007 – and has steadily increased its share of votes and seats. In the 2007 elections, it won the largest number of votes. But as a

consequence of Morocco's electoral law and gerrymandering, the PJD only gained the second largest number of mandates in parliament.

Toward the regime, the PJD has pursued a very cautious strategy over the last decade, avoiding any direct challenge or even a critique of palace-sponsored laws. This was driven by the fear of a party ban, especially after the terrorist attacks in Casablanca of 16 May 2003, which led to a general anti-Islamist campaign. In order not to be negatively affected by this atmosphere, the PJD showed its pragmatism. It voted for palace laws that went against its ideological convictions, such as the reform of the family status code. The PJD also reduced its electoral coverage to only 16 percent of the constituencies in the 2003 communal elections by withdrawing electoral lists that had already been set up for the previously agreed to 50 percent of districts.

Instead of confrontation, the PJD has focused on the development of its organizational and electoral mobilization capacities. Its hope is that in the future, increasing electoral strength would allow it to lead a more coherent government (that is, with a smaller number of parties included in the government coalition) and thereby assert the role of representative institutions vis-à-vis the monarchy. Raising the profile and importance of representative institutions has also been the focus of the PJD's work in parliament, where it has assumed much more of an active role than other parties. This has included the attendance of the general assemblies and commissions, the questioning of the government, and the proposition of bills and amendments.

Western actors are typically concerned with four issues with respect to Islamists: violence, women's rights, democracy, and the role attributed to Islamic law. In all four areas, the PJD is a comparatively unproblematic Islamist party for the EU and the US. Since the early 1980s, it has rejected violence as a legitimate means of action. Its practice shows that it is neither more nor less hostile to women's rights than the great majority of Moroccan parties. The emancipation of women in a Western sense is not a party goal and the PJD opposed the reform of the personal status code that provided for an increase in women's rights. However, many parties, or at least factions inside parties, such as the Istiqlal, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, and the Constitutional Union, also opposed this reform. Indeed, the PJD has demonstrated a positive attitude towards the participation of women in public life, as demonstrated by its 15 percent women's quota for the party congress, and a proportion of female electoral candidates that is equal to or above that of secular parties. As for democratic attitudes, the party's internal structures are more democratic than those of other Moroccan parties: PJD members are comparatively influential regarding the election of the party leadership and the nomination of electoral candidates. Finally, the application of Islamic law is neither a party priority nor in its electoral program, and the PJD has never campaigned on slogans such as "Islam is the solution."

## EU and US Policies Towards Morocco

The sorts of moderate policies supported by PJD around violence, women, democracy and *sharia* all underscore the need to rethink policies towards Morocco's Islamist opposition. Current European and US approaches show pro-regime policies that provide material resources and external legitimacy to the regime. Both share the interpretation that a reform-minded, modern King leads Morocco. As for the EU, Morocco is a major beneficiary of funding in the framework of the EMP. European governments and EU officials tend to praise the Moroccan "democratization process" – as last demonstrated by the positive reactions to the parliamentary elections in September 2007. Europeans have refrained from criticizing increasing human rights abuses in Morocco since the early 2000s. Overall, Europeans limit themselves to supporting reform initiatives of the Moroccan government, reforms which are intended to stabilize the current regime rather than shift towards a more democratic system. In turn, US pro-regime policies have been underscored by an increase in military and economic aid since September 11. Most recently, this support took the form of an agreement in August 2007 that entitles Morocco to approximately US\$700 million in the framework of the Millennium Challenge Account.

Where Europeans and American policies diverge, however, is in their approach towards the Islamists in Morocco. While the Europeans do not explicitly exclude the PJD, they have so far avoided cooperating with the party. Islamists have not received funding from EU civil society programs, for example. The Europeans treat the PJD as any Islamist party in the Arab world, that is, as an essentially negative political force that stands in the way of the EU's interest in externally-promoted democratization. The US, in contrast, treats the PJD as any legitimate Moroccan opposition party. The PJD has been integrated into programs of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) that aim to strengthen political parties and enhance their campaigning skills.

For the EU, one of the underlying reasons for the policies appears to be the strong influence of Spain and especially France on the definition of EU priorities in the Maghreb. Both countries objected to the democratization agenda towards the South from the inception of the EMP. Both countries have a strong interest in migration control and anti-terrorism measures for which they have to rely on the cooperation of incumbent governments on the southern rim of the Mediterranean. The EU policy towards Islamists appears to be influenced particularly by the good French contacts with the regime and the secular elite. Relying on France's assessment of these elites obviously tends to increase distrust amongst EU policymakers towards the Islamists.

As for the US, it is noteworthy that Morocco is a comparatively irrelevant country in the context of US strategic interests in the region. It is far away from Israel and Iraq and it does not possess oil or gas reserves. Thus, US policies appear to be motivated mainly by values. The Moroccan regime demonstrates that democracy in the Middle East and North Africa is pos-

sible, at least when measured by holding regular and relatively transparent elections. The inclusion of Islamists in US democracy promotion programs also provides evidence that the US is not against Islamists, as long as they are “moderate.”

### **A Shared European-US Policy Approach?**

In spite of the current pro-regime bias of European and US policies, a realistic case can be made for a policy shift vis-à-vis Morocco that could benefit both European governments and the US while promoting their shared goal of democratization. Morocco’s lack of relevant natural resources and its relative distance from Middle East conflicts insulate political liberalization from two major strategic considerations that typically hamper the commitment of Western actors for reform. Importantly, the Moroccan Islamist movement is generally committed to non-violence and the PJD, in particular, is an Islamist party that is among the most compatible with Western values anywhere in the region. Although one can rightly question whether the policies of Western actors should be guided by the congruence of local actors with Western values, the PJD’s accommodation of these values makes it more likely that Western actors can overcome their innate distrust of political Islam.

From the above analysis follows that a policy supporting genuine political reform should mainly focus on increasing the legitimacy resources of Islamist actors and decreasing those of the regime. As regards Islamists, one way to achieve this easily is by converging EU policies towards the US approach. The Europeans could strengthen the PJD by treating it as a legitimate political actor and including it in programs that support dialogue or aim at building parties’ capacities. Such a stance has several advantages. First, it would strengthen the pragmatic faction inside the PJD by demonstrating that European actors honor compromise and openness. Second, it would bring the Europeans into closer contact with the PJD. Through dialogue, the EU can find out directly what the PJD’s goals are and what degree of cooperation they desire. Third, it would make the PJD less vulnerable with respect to regime interventions into party affairs, such as forcing the party to change the head of its parliamentary group in 2003, or defining in advance who is an acceptable candidate for party leadership, as occurred in 2004. Europeans should prepare for accusations from Moroccan actors and the media that the EU seeks to destabilize the country. The US faces similar criticisms for its “pro-Islamist” policies. Nonetheless, European governments, like the US, have an interest in a stronger PJD able to integrate Islamist sympathizers that might otherwise join more militant organizations.

There is, of course, one obvious problem with this recommendation. For Islamists to play an integrative role, and for maintaining the credibility of opposition actors more generally, political parties need to gain more influence on policy. This requires an adjustment of the current regime, and thus, a commitment to sustained external pressure. Here, external

actors could adopt three lines of action. A first is to push for a reform of the electoral law to make elections more representative, particularly around the asymmetry between urban and rural districts. Currently, an MP represents between 3,000 voters in the countryside, where politics are still dominated by clientelism and local notables, or 64,000 voters in cities, where secular Leftist parties and the PJD have the biggest following. Second, and more generally, the US and the Europeans should stop their gratuitous praise of the Moroccan “democratization process.” Besides the fact that the king rules and governs, such praise sounds absurd to the ears of those 70 percent of eligible Moroccan voters who did not bother to vote in the September 2007 parliamentary elections due to the current system’s democratic deficits. Finally, the EU and the US need to acknowledge the political reality of increasing human rights abuses in Morocco. That these mainly harm Islamists should not be a reason for not condemning them.

The advent of such a policy shift is perhaps more likely to take place in the US, where “strategic issues” are less at stake. The Europeans, in turn, need to reassess their hierarchy of interests. A convenient retreat to the principle of “non-intervention” is not really an option given the extent to which the current policy in support of the regime does intervene strongly into power relationships in Morocco.

## **Building Momentum for Reform: The Islamist-Secular Alliance in Yemen**

*Mona Yacoubian*

Islamist actors can play a significant role in the peaceful transition from authoritarian to democratic governance. Islamist parties typically boast leaders who are young and dynamic. Their party organizations brim with energy and ideas, attracting those who seek change. Unlike their secular counterparts, Islamists possess well-developed and easily mobilized grassroots networks. Their strong ties to the community are deeply enmeshed in a wide-ranging network of mosques and charitable organizations.

At the same time, Islamist actors have often been at the forefront of opposition movements demanding greater political freedoms in the Arab world. A wide variety of Islamist parties, from the Party of Justice and Development in Morocco to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, have issued statements and platforms demanding comprehensive democratic reform, including free elections, the peaceful transfer of power, an independent judiciary, and civil liberties. Throughout the region, Islamist political parties are playing a larger role in propelling political reforms forward. As with their secular opposition party counterparts, however, their efforts have met with very limited success. Authoritarian governments in the region are increasingly resorting to repression and cracking down on the region's nascent reform movement.

For evolution toward more open and democratic systems of governance to gain momentum, Islamist actors – with their deeply embedded ties to the community – must be included. Indeed, moderate Islamist actors are crucial players in the region's quest for greater political opening. Moderate Islamist parties have proven their popular strength, ability to do well in free elections, and capacity to evolve toward greater moderation. Perhaps more than ever, it is essential for both Islamist and secular advocates for reform to work together against recalcitrant regimes whose authoritarian systems remain deeply entrenched. Yemen offers an important – if unparalleled – instance of Islamist-secular cooperation on promoting political reform.

This short contribution explores the role of Islamist actors in Yemen. Following a brief background section, it examines the role of US democracy promoters – specifically the National Democratic Institute (NDI) – working with the Yemeni Islah party, a legal, moderate Islamist party. Brief recommendations for a shared US-EU agenda are offered in conclusion.

## **Background: The Path of Reform in Yemen**

Yemen's political reforms were initiated in 1990 with the unification of North and South Yemen. Key changes included the legalization of opposition parties, laws giving voting and candidacy rights to all citizens over 18 and calling for regularly-held elections, and expanded press freedoms. Parliamentary elections were held in 1993. However progress toward reform was marred by numerous setbacks, capped in 2001 by the president's consolidation of power, including the power to dissolve parliament. The president also ensured greater executive control over the legislature by enlarging the president-appointed upper house. More recently, in September 2006, president Ali Abdullah Saleh extended his rule to nearly three decades in an election widely criticized by opposition groups and international observers. Yemen's difficulties are further deepened by its widespread poverty, high illiteracy rates and endemic corruption. While Yemen's short-term prospects for democratic reform remain dim, observers are now focusing on whether the opposition, particularly the Islamist Islah party, with its strong grassroots base, can serve as a political counterweight to the regime and as an agitator for democratic reform.

## **Islah's Relevance to Peaceful Transition**

The Yemeni Assembly for Reform, known popularly as Islah, was founded in 1990. Its roots and spiritual core lie in Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood, which was established in the early 1960s. Led by one of Yemen's most influential tribal leaders, Sheikh Abdullah Hussein al Ahmar, the Islah party is more a loose coalition of tribal and religious elements than a political party. Its membership includes people associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, pious conservatives attached to Yemen's religious institutes, and key segments of the tribal population. Islah's base, considered the fastest growing in Yemen, is young and angry with the status quo. With 40 percent of Yemen's population living below the poverty line, Islah has been mobilizing support by opposing widespread government corruption and the lack of basic public services.

Beginning in the late 1990s, Islah spearheaded opposition to the government's mounting encroachment on nascent democratic reforms. Despite its socially conservative cast, Islah has long emphasized its commitment to reform and democratic governance, calling for greater political pluralism, an independent judiciary, and the peaceful transfer of power. It is the only opposition party with broad popular appeal. Clearly, Islah has a valuable role to play in any peaceful transition given its powerful, widespread popularity, and advocacy for greater political opening.

During the 2003 parliamentary elections, which were marred by widespread irregularities, the ruling General Popular Congress (GPC) gained 225 of 301 seats while Islah won only 46 seats. Nonetheless, the Islamist party had the greatest number of seats among opposition parties. The

Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), the other principal opposition group, won only seven seats.

### **The Islamist-Secular Opposition Alliance JMP**

Beginning in 2002, Islah allied itself with a group of secular opposition parties, including the YSP, to better advocate democratic reforms. The Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), whose primary goal is to push the government to allow for greater democratic reforms and political opening, was created out of this coalition of six parties. Essentially, however, the JMP is a collaborative effort between Islah and the YSP, an ardently secular party.

In November 2005, the group drafted a comprehensive reform platform, calling for a parliamentary system with diminished executive powers, an independent judiciary, improved electoral laws, and the depoliticization of the military. The platform stands as an important milestone for Islamist-secular cooperation and a model for bridging the gap between Islamists and secularists. Beyond the joint reform platform, JMP members also pressured the government to amend electoral procedures before the September 2006 presidential elections. In those elections, the coalition fielded a joint candidate whose campaign offered Yemenis a genuine reform alternative to President Saleh in the country's first true multi-candidate presidential election.

While the JMP began as a weak and ineffectual alliance wracked by division, it has evolved into a serious advocate for reform that might be an effective counterweight to the government. The parties have worked together on a number of process-related issues, such as the electoral law reform. The JMP's two principal members, Islah and the YSP, realized that cooperation was essential to opposing the government's power. As Abdul Wahab al Anisi, deputy secretary general of Islah explained, "We subordinated our ideological agendas to the one thing we all had in common, which was a realization that political reform was a necessity if we were to save democracy in Yemen and stop the country's descent into endemic corruption."<sup>1</sup>

Yemen's JMP stands as an important development in fostering a peaceful transition from authoritarian rule. While Yemen's path to genuine political reform is fraught with obstacles, the building of an Islamist-secular coalition for reform is laudable. Indeed, few (if any) countries in the region have witnessed similar levels of Islamist-secular cooperation on reform. Given Yemen's precarious path toward reform, the JMP has been critical to ensuring that sustained democratic opening remains on the agenda. Despite the Yemeni government's attempts to sow dissension within the coalition, the JMP has already begun to oppose the government more coherently and forward its reform agenda. The Islamist-secular coalition appears to embody precisely the type of cooperation that many

<sup>1</sup> Faiza Saleh Ambah, "Technocrat Recasts Yemen's Presidential Race, Political Future," *Washington Post*, 20 September 2006.

observers deem necessary throughout the Arab world. These types of Islamist-secular alliances could play a key role in helping to ensure a peaceful transition to more democratic systems.

### **US Policies Towards Islamist Actors**

US engagement of moderate Islamists (i.e. those Islamist parties that are legal, non-violent, and call for inclusive political systems based on democratic systems of governance) remains debated. Yet US democracy promoters, most notably the NDI and the International Republican Institute (IRI), have been working with legal Islamist parties over the past decade. US engagement has been most successful in countries where democratic reform is already underway and where the government is genuinely committed to political opening. Other factors for success include the Islamist parties' political sophistication, popular credibility, and openness to working with American organizations. Overall, a successful engagement strategy seeks to empower reform-minded moderates within the Islamist movement as well as to strengthen key institutions such as parliament. Ideally, successful policies will lead to greater transparency, accountability, and shifts toward moderation within Islamist parties. While it is difficult to measure a shift in ideological stance empirically, evolution toward moderation can be gauged by political platforms that embody democratic principles, and greater internal transparency within the party's structure, among other indicators.

NDI started working in Yemen in 1993, opening its field office in 1997. As with other Yemeni political parties, the Institute has engaged with Islah in the areas of party development, strengthening parliament and women's participation. The organization works exclusively with party moderates. NDI's chief representative in Sanaa meets regularly with Islah's secretary general, as well as deputy and other leaders. Indeed, NDI appears to have established excellent working relations with Islah. NDI staff meet regularly with Islah members at all levels, which seems to have fostered a well-established sense of trust between moderate Islah reformers and the Institute. NDI staff in Yemen emphasized that it is "the endless phone calls and meetings that overall make a real difference. Trainings simply open the door for contact. A tremendous amount of follow-up, advice, and strategizing goes on beyond the formal training programs. It is here that we may in fact have the greatest impact."<sup>2</sup> NDI representatives noted that compared with other political parties participating in their training programs, Islah was better organized and more capable of affecting the reform movement.

A crucial part of NDI's work centers on building relations between opposition party leaders and fostering secular-Islamist cooperation on reform. NDI uses inter-party dialogue to advance the reform agenda, in particular providing important support to the JMP. Indeed, the JMP may represent the most important success of NDI's work in Yemen. While NDI did not

<sup>2</sup> Author's interview, 3 July 2006.

create the JMP, members of both Islah and the YSP have commended NDI for its advice and training, noting the Institute's important contributions to their joint efforts. In particular, NDI focused on promoting the JMP's reform platform, meeting with several JMP members to translate elements of the program into a concrete election platform. NDI also played a role in bringing the JMP members together, hosting numerous meetings, as well as sponsoring trips abroad for Islamist and secular party members.

## Policy Recommendations

The policies of the US and its European counterparts have little in common with respect to the sensitive question of engaging Islamist political parties. The US approach is embodied in the work of the national party institutes that offer political party training in a variety of areas to legal Islamist parties in the Middle East as part of their broader programming efforts. Of course, they offer similar training and support to secular parties as well. By contrast, European actors by and large do *not* provide training or other types of support directly to Islamist parties in the region. Instead, their support appears to favor economic development and social sector reforms rather than overtly political engagement. In addition, members of the EU do not act as a unitary actor on the highly complex issue of Islamists and their role in promoting democratic reform. On the contrary, European policies toward Islamist actors differ substantially from one country to the next, depending on the specific strategic imperatives and national interests of each member state. There is no one European policy on the variety of challenges posed by Islamists; instead a multiplicity of views and approaches prevail.

These widely differing approaches leave little space for a shared agenda with respect to Islamist actors in the region. Nonetheless, while American and European approaches differ substantially, their broader strategic goals are quite similar: namely, the promotion of democratic systems of governance that embody transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. As such, both the US and its European partners should continue to promote strong institutions, parliaments in particular. The role of Islamist actors, including the potential challenges they pose, must also be acknowledged. As such, three specific recommendations should be considered:

**1. Share analysis on the phenomenon of Islamism.** Regular exchanges and analysis sharing between the US and the EU is critical. At a minimum, it is essential for policy makers on both sides of the Atlantic to be working on a common set of analytic assumptions. The complexity of Islamist actors coupled with the breadth and depth of Islamism and its varied roles in the region cannot be overstated. Moreover, the phenomenon is not static, but dynamic, responding to a variety of both internal and external forces. Questions abound as to the key drivers of the Islamist phenomenon and its potential trajectories. Indeed, there is

not one Islamist challenge, but many. At the same time, answers to key questions, such as “How central is Islam to Islamists?” are not clear.

- 2. Improve information sharing on the ground.** American and European actors, both governmental and non-governmental, should work harder to share information, particularly regarding the key players in any local setting as well as experience with “best practices.” Ideally, a common database, or even better, a “Wiki-base,” providing continually updated insights into key actors and successful policies and programs should be established on a country-wide basis. This information could run the gamut from Islamist parties to NGOs and charitable networks. At a minimum, a joint effort to “map” the universe of Islamist actors in any particular country could go a long way toward improving understanding. Moreover, shared access to a common database could prevent redundancies and help democracy promoters and others to “hit the ground running” when arriving in country.
- 3. Joint US-EU support for Islamist-secular reform coalitions.** While European actors may be reluctant to engage moderate Islamist parties directly, supporting Islamist-secular coalitions may provide an important opportunity to engage with Islamist actors and move the reform agenda forward. Coalitions such as the JMP in Yemen have played an important role in pressuring recalcitrant regimes to reform. At the same time, these types of alliances could allow a less controversial entrée to engagement with Islamist parties. The relative success of the JMP in Yemen could be replicated in other Arab countries. American and European policy makers should consider working jointly to support the JMP while supporting the formation of similar Islamist-secular alliances for reform elsewhere in the region.

## Toward “Normal Politics” in the Arab World: The Case for Engaging Islamists in International Democracy Assistance Initiatives

*Leslie Campbell*

Far from being a failure, the policy of assisting democracy in the Middle East is starting to show remarkable dividends. Democratic norms and freedoms are increasingly part of public demands. In just one important example, the democratic openings that have been achieved appear to have encouraged many Islamist activists to pursue their agendas through the ballot box rather than through violence or destabilization.

Across the region, even where democratic progress is scarce, the language of debate is changing. Citizens' demands are often phrased in terms of “rights” and criticism of government officials and policies is becoming common. Consider some recent examples: newspapers in Algeria have been writing about corruption and nepotism; Kuwaiti women have gained the vote, causing Saudi women to also demand more rights; Yemen has formed a public anti-corruption commission; the Bahraini parliament has debated pension reform; Moroccans cast protest votes in recent elections; and Tunisian opposition figures have started a hunger strike demanding an end to harassment.

Despite its association with the Bush Administration, which remains unpopular in the region, the democracy agenda appears to have gained traction at the grassroots and has been adopted by other international actors, including EU member states, the EU Parliament, and even EU Commission Directorates, not to mention UN agencies like the United Nations Development Program, United Nations Development Fund for Women, and others. Increasingly, the actions of Middle Eastern governments are measured by how they stack up against democratic norms, both at home and abroad. That does not mean there is a “democracy tsunami,” but the changing discourse is itself important, as we learned from the Helsinki process during the Cold War.

### **Democratic Openings and NDI Support**

There have been important, seemingly permanent, democratic changes along the way. In Yemen, though the country is still dominated by the ruling party, the Opposition Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), once in danger of complete extinction, has survived and grown, recently forming a unique Islamic-secular coalition with the Islah party to demand political and civil liberties. Yemenis now have a real choice in elections and in policy options. In Morocco, an indigenous advocacy effort, supported behind the scenes by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), led to a voluntary national women's list for Parliament in 2002, with 35 women taking office. This success has had repercussions around the Arab Middle East,

leading directly to the election of six women in Jordan, and indirectly, to a women's quota in Iraq, and the election of women in Bahrain and Qatar.

Domestic election monitoring, now a regular feature in most Arab elections, was pioneered in the region by NDI, with thousands of activists and regional networks taking part in the local observation of election and campaign processes. The domestic monitoring effort in Egypt, with NDI training, led to the severe downward revision of turnout figures, which have historically been inflated, and to widespread reporting of flagrant voting abuses in parliamentary and presidential elections. The seeming normalization of "Islamic party" politics in recent elections in Yemen, Morocco, and Bahrain has roots in democracy initiatives supported by US and European donors. Peaceful Islamist parties – those whose policies are informed by Islamic principles but which shun violence – have been included in a myriad of training programs and exchange visits sponsored by NDI and other democracy oriented institutes and think tanks. Parties like the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) in Morocco, Al Wefaq in Bahrain, and Islah in Yemen, have benefited from an exchange of views and experiences, and Western governments have become more accepting of a moderate Islamist point of view. Peaceful and lawful participation in elections is just one positive byproduct of expanded interaction facilitated by US and European democracy assistance policies.

### **Resistance by Authoritarian Regimes**

There are many other individual success stories. But the story would not be complete without discussion of the "push-back" or resistance experienced in late 2005 and 2006. Algeria, Egypt, and Bahrain, all countries where democratic progress has been somewhat "insincere," that is, where governments only ever intended limited "tactical" liberalization, all pushed-back in 2006. NDI's representative had to leave Bahrain and its Algeria director was denied a visa after five years of hindered but somewhat successful work in the country. The Egyptian government asked the International Republican Institute's (IRI) Egypt director to leave the country, shortly after a much heralded US government decision to provide direct grants to NGOs outside the purview of the bilateral agreement. *Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Initiatives*, always difficult, suffered setbacks as governments refused to commit to more progress.

Yet, despite the resistance, gains were made over 2006. Yemen, denied Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) program assistance, started an anti-corruption campaign. Kuwait extended the vote and political candidacy to women. Lebanon's democratic civil society came out of the Israel Lebanon war invigorated, providing some counter-balance to Hezbollah. NDI's work with Fatah and smaller Palestinian parties has more depth than ever before. A new "Gulf Municipalities Association," including Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and UAE, has been formed to strengthen elected local government. More recently, Morocco invited NDI to organize

an international observer delegation to the elections of 7 September 2007 – a first for the country.

### **Political Pragmatism of Islamists**

In the meantime, a key fear that Islamists would win unbridled power and grow increasingly radicalized has, so far, not been borne out by experience. Islamist groups may not have moderated their views – indeed, it is very hard to measure “moderation.” But they have become politically pragmatic in pursuing their agenda through peaceful political participation, and therefore, subject to the inherent limitations and checks any legal political entity must endure. The question then, is what are democratic openings bringing us?

On 7 September 2007, Moroccans went to the polls to elect a new legislature. The big news was that Morocco’s main Islamist party, the PJD, made little news. Expectations were fuelled by public opinion polls and the PJD’s own public pronouncements that the party would dominate the election winning a plurality of seats. While the party did, by a small margin, gain the largest vote total, they gained the second largest number of seats, faring worse than expected. The PJD has accepted the results, and Morocco seems poised to take a positive, albeit modest, step forward. Why? Because the PJD has been welcomed into a slowly liberalizing political system where the party plays by the rules, and where pragmatism is the accepted and expected order of the day.

In Yemen, Islah, once the party of radical clerics like Sheik Abdul-Majid Zindani, last year co-sponsored, with the Yemeni Socialist Party, the moderate and secular Faisal bin Shamlan as presidential candidate. While bin Shamlan won only 22 percent of the vote, Yemen’s presidential election was hailed as the first genuinely competitive presidential election in an Arab country, and most remarkably, Islah and its partners graciously accepted defeat as they vowed to re-organize and regroup to try again next time.

In Bahrain, the largest Shia Islamist force, Al Wefaq, won just under 50 percent of the legislative seats up for grabs in November 2006. While they complained bitterly about some election practices, Al Wefaq MPs have taken their seats and have become strong advocates for the rights of the majority Shia population in the Gulf state. More radical Shia groups still take to the streets, burning cars and causing mini-riots, but the die has been cast; the majority of Bahrainis prefer political participation as a way of securing full civic rights.

Of course, the picture is not uniformly positive. The Hamas election victory in 2006 and the increasing military and political strength of Hezbollah are cause for great concern. Both have used violence for political aims. But in both cases, the recourse to violence did not secure their objectives and they appear, for now, to believe that their legitimacy will turn primarily on their democratic bona fides as opposed to force of arms. Thus far, Hamas has reacted to the appointment of an interim government

in June 2007 with primarily political arguments. Chagrined by the actions of their supporters in Gaza, Hamas leaders are attempting to reestablish their legitimacy as a political organization, not necessarily as a violent movement, although the potential for great violence still exists. Hezbollah and its Syrian backers seem reluctant to topple the elected Siniora government by brute force, although they almost certainly could. This does not presage a newly peaceful Hezbollah, but it does show that peaceful political processes have gained much currency, even in war-torn Lebanon. The tragic and unforgivable assassinations of pro-government political figures stand as an illustration of the tenuous nature of the political system in Lebanon.

Even in Iraq, the epicenter of tragic violence, it is striking how many of the players rely on democratic credentials to support their political legitimacy. It is not the sole source of legitimacy in Iraq, but it is a remarkably resilient one.

### **The Attractiveness of Islamist Parties**

NDI recently conducted a series of focus groups in Morocco, Lebanon, and Jordan to explore the reasons for the popularity of Islamist political parties, and to determine if secular/non-religious parties in the Arab world could draw lessons from the success of their religious counterparts. The focus groups, conducted in March 2007 in Lebanon and Jordan, and in late 2006 in Morocco, were organized by NDI and local partners in fully equipped, professionally run facilities (copies of the reports of focus groups can be obtained from NDI on request). The basic questionnaires were similar to allow comparisons across groups. The parties in question included the PJD in Morocco, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan. NDI hypothesized prior to the focus groups that the popularity of Islamist groups arose from the delivery of tangible benefits, including social services, and from a negative political message based on a rejection of western values and agendas.

The findings were strikingly similar across countries and challenge conventional wisdom about Islamist parties, particularly the hypothesis that the provision of social services is the basis of their success. In each case the success of Islamist parties seems to be based on two strong perceptions:

1. Islamist parties are seen as “resisting,” literally and figuratively, the imposition of outside values and culture. Other parties were seen as too quick to compromise or create alliances with external forces. Being concerned with social and religious values, and the impact of modernity on their identity, participants valued the message of religious parties – perceiving the Islamists as effective protectors of key cultural attributes. Islamic party supporters, however, clearly rejected a religious state, strongly differentiating between the protection of cultural and religious identity as a concept and the imposition of religious values through state institutions.

2. Religious beliefs and values, as expressed by Islamic party leaders, are strongly associated with ethical, just, and efficient governance. In other words, the religious convictions of Islamic party leaders give potential voters strong cues about how that leader might behave in government and participants strongly believed that Islamic parties were more likely to behave ethically and to act as responsible shepherds of the public good.

Another fascinating finding is that Islam and Islamist parties were not associated with extremism but rather with moderation. Islam is a moderating force, participants argued. Islam's call to be moderate, tolerant, and faithful were all seen as important guarantees of public stability, as were religious practices like fasting, praying, donating to the poor, and loyalty to family and community. The provision of services was seldom mentioned, even under prodding, and in the Jordanian case participants could not imagine a service they needed that was not already provided by the government. In Lebanon, participants were critical of the failures of the Lebanese state and thankful to Hezbollah for the provision of services. But ethical behavior and protection of the fabric of Lebanese society were far stronger motivators than services.

The focus group results could be good news for non-religious and liberal parties in the Middle East. If Islamist success is based on political modes of behavior and messages that can be emulated, rather than on Byzantine Islamic networks of mosques and charities, then with sufficient internal reform and political will, all parties should be able to compete with Islamists for votes. A battle of ideas is important, but secular parties will also need to address perceived shortcomings in ethical behavior and deep-seated insecurities about modernity and the loss of identity that come with globalization and change.

## **The Future of Democracy Promotion**

For those concerned with democracy policy and democracy promotion, this is good news indeed. The potential for "normal politics" in the Arab world is strong. The main preoccupation of voters, shown in a number of surveys, including those conducted by NDI's sister organization IRI, show the state of the economy and joblessness outpacing other concerns among voters by a large margin. NDI focus groups suggest that Islamist parties do not enjoy unique attributes. Rather, they are simply capitalizing on deeply held fears and insecurities that other political parties could and should also address.

The backlash against the full spectrum of President Bush's policies has many previous supporters of democracy from the liberal camp supporting forms of neo-realism and resorting to arguments favoring stability in the Middle East. And yet, as I discussed earlier, engagement in the Middle East, particularly with moderate, peaceful Islamist parties, has delivered true results.

If we view the democracy agenda as being five years into a six year plan, the results are modest. However, if we view democracy promotion in the Middle East as part of a long term, perhaps generational challenge lasting 25 years or more, then there are many reasons for optimism and the trajectory seems right. The benefit of democracy assistance efforts, to the US and the rest of the world, if only in the moderation and normalization of the Islamist agenda, is already substantial. If the slow liberalization effect of the overall democracy push is taken into account, and we continue to back the legitimate demands of Arab citizens as they seek their place in the modern world, neo-conservatives, neo-realists and idealists alike can share credit for the accomplishment and the world will be better for it.

**A Shared US-EU Agenda  
Towards the Muslim World?**



## The Challenge of Islamists: Elements of a Shared US-EU Agenda Towards the Muslim World

*Muriel Asseburg*

Islamist politics pose a complex set of challenges for European and American policies. These challenges intersect multiple policy fields, including defense, combating terrorism, democracy promotion, regional stabilization, conflict settlement, peace building and domestic politics. At the same time, Islam or Islamism are not actors and therefore can neither be addressed directly by Western policies, nor do they explain the core of the challenges or conflicts at hand. Therefore an analytical approach that distinguishes between key challenges and actors is more useful in informing policies towards the Muslim world. Key challenges include violent conflict, fragile and failing states, and political transformations that more often than not point in the direction of authoritarian consolidation rather than democratization. These are highly interconnected and mutually reinforcing, posing actual or potential threats of instability, blocked development, and negative spillover effects for the EU and the US. And while many actors in the region are indeed Islamists – of very different strands – none of the challenges is specifically linked to Islam, nor are they confined to the Muslim world (defined as those countries with a majority Muslim population).

It is evident that there cannot and should not be a single policy for addressing the diverse challenges, actors, and the large number of countries concerned, countries that do not even form a region, and which are culturally, politically, and economically diverse. At the same time, it has become obvious that EU and US policies towards the Muslim world often are based on simplistic analysis of complex and overlapping conflicts, and do not make use of all policy instruments available. Current policies tend to be guided largely by threat perceptions, resource dependency, and military approaches to conflict management. They also tend to be framed in the terms of the global “war on terror,” and to show a preference for authoritarian stabilization over democracy promotion, reacting to short-term events rather than aiming at longer-term transformations. As Steven Heydemann points out in his contribution, US policies towards the Muslim world have favored policies that rest on confrontation, isolation, and containment rather than employing the whole range of instruments including engagement and negotiation.

In fact, incumbent governments in many countries in the Muslim world have applied similar policies, excluding opposition forces and isolating potential veto actors, resulting in blocked democratic transitions, and ultimately, generating conflict and fragility. In this context, the term “Islamists” is often used by actors in the region and their Western supporters not as an analytical category, but as a synonym for radicalism and vio-

lence, employed to discredit the agendas of political forces and to justify their exclusion from formal political processes.

This contribution focuses on US and EU policies in the overlapping fields of democracy promotion and the peaceful transformation of conflicts in the Muslim world. Building on the contributions to this volume, it highlights current policy approaches, asks how they could be improved, and points to policy fields where cooperation, coordination, or a division of labor between the US and the EU are most promising.

### **Democracy Promotion versus Regime Stabilization**

While the US administration pushed the “Freedom Agenda” with great fanfare after the September 11 attacks, for example with the initiation of the *G8 Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Initiative*, since late 2005 we have witnessed a backlash against democracy promotion, both in the “West” and in the Muslim world. This skepticism about the merits of democracy promotion has to be understood in reaction to recent events perceived as threatening EU and US interests, including: the violent escalation in Iraq and the failure of the “democratic dominoes” approach; the spectacular electoral success of Islamists in Egypt, Iraq and Palestine; and the perceived need to strengthen so-called “moderate” (read: pro-Western) regimes such as Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi-Arabia in face of a perceived increase in Iranian influence.

The cumulative impact of these events has returned us to an approach dominated by regime stabilization, at least at the level of “high politics” involving government to government relations. As Daniel Brumberg points out in his contribution, the Bush administration’s support of some of the most authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world has demoralized democracy activists. He also explains that while the erratic nature of US foreign policies was vividly displayed by America’s response to the attacks of September 11, Washington’s foreign policy dualism – alternating between realism and Wilsonianism – has deep historical roots.

Indeed, the recent backlash cannot be equated with a paradigm shift, as democracy promotion for the US has always been subjugated to geo-strategic interests, just as it has for the EU. Consequently, since the end of the Cold War, EU and US policies have wavered between two main approaches. On the one hand, Europeans and Americans have by and large agreed that in order to achieve mid- to long-term stability, policies should aim at fostering more legitimate, participatory governance, the rule of law, and more open, less repressive political systems. On the other hand, however, policies have focused on safeguarding strategic interests by emphasizing short-term stability through close cooperation with long-standing partners deemed reliable. This second approach has involved bolstering regime stability, and cooperating with incumbent regimes in policy fields where interests converge, such as the management of migration, or combating terrorism and organized crime. This has translated into contradictory approaches, with US and EU agendas alternating between democracy

promotion and regime stabilization, or even pursuing them concurrently through different branches of government or different agencies.

At the same time, at the level of “low politics” there has been continuity in democracy promotion efforts in the work of civil society organizations in the region and democracy promoting agencies, such as the German political foundations, the EU Commission and Parliament, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and others. They have concentrated on bottom up, long-term approaches with the objective of empowering civil society and local reform actors, fostering pluralism and socio-economic development. As Leslie Campbell emphasizes in his contribution, such democracy promotion efforts in the Middle East have started to yield results. Democratic norms and freedoms have increasingly become part of public discourse. And the democratic openings that have been achieved, albeit limited, have encouraged many Islamists to pursue their agendas through the ballot box rather than violence; when and where Islamists have been allowed to do so, they have started to work for change within the political systems.

However, it is doubtful that these successes will be sustained. In fact, in countries such as Egypt, Morocco, or Jordan, regimes have used measures such as constitutional amendments, election laws, and excessive gerrymandering to exclude or weaken Islamist parties – all with at least the tacit support of the EU and the US. Consequently (and because they have realized that in partially liberalized systems participation in parliaments or governments does not translate into influence on decision-making), some of the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated groups and parties have begun to reconsider their participation in existing political systems. Indeed, measures aimed at exclusion threaten to re-radicalize these groups and ultimately pose the dangers of a surge in violence and a reorientation of Islamist movements from governance and human rights issues towards a predominantly religious and moral agenda, with which it is easiest for them to mobilize support. Neither development would be in the interest of the EU and the US. Therefore, while abrupt regime change through war, externally instigated “revolutions,” or efforts at social engineering have not helped democratic transitions, Western approaches that retreat from the objectives of fostering more competitive political systems and good governance and of safeguarding human rights will not prove viable in the mid- to long-term.

### **Lessons Learned from Turkey**

As Steven Cook argues in his contribution, Turkey serves as an outstanding example of integrating Islamists into the political system, with the AKP becoming a powerful force for reform and leading a remarkable course towards a more democratic, law-based, inclusive system – even if democracy is not yet consolidated in present day Turkey. This concurs with one of the main findings of a study published at SWP this spring: when considering whether Islamists promote reform or reproduce existing authoritarian

patterns, it is most important to look at the political and legal environment in which they (and other actors) have to work rather than focusing on the ideological or religious background of Islamist movements.<sup>1</sup> The more competitive the political system and the more incentives for democratic agendas, the greater the chances that Islamists will adopt pragmatic, moderate positions and prove themselves to be reform actors.

The Turkish case also illustrates the positive influence that the EU can exert with regards to democratization by influencing the incentive structure through the promise of EU integration and application of the Copenhagen criteria – an incentive structure that, to state the obvious, does not exist with regards to other countries in the Muslim world. The incentive of EU membership not only altered the interests of Turkey's Islamists, it also constrained the ability of the military to inhibit political reform. However, as Cook emphasizes, EU-Turkey relations are at a critical juncture today as many people in the EU, as well as leaders of some of its most influential states (France and Germany in particular), believe there is no place for an overwhelmingly Muslim country in the Union. The rejection of Turkish membership will possibly entail severe consequences: it will be perceived in the Muslim world as additional evidence that the West is hostile to Islam, withdraw important incentives for change so that the necessary reforms for the consolidation of Turkish democracy may not occur, and lead to an even more nationalist and insular society. It is therefore in the interest of the EU to collaborate with Turkey in overcoming obstacles to membership.

### **Engaging Islamists in Democracy Promotion**

“Engaging Islamists” has become one of the trendy dictums of democracy promotion efforts. And indeed, genuine political openings require that Islamists, often the dominant opposition force, be included in the political space. While Europeans have for the first time implicitly accepted an inclusive approach in their 2004 *Strategy for the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, they have so far been reluctant to apply it. As illustrated by the practical examples of NDI's and the International Republican Institute (IRI)'s work in the Middle East that Leslie Campbell discusses, US democracy promoters have been much more pragmatic in this regard – even if Islamist opposition forces have only been consistently engaged in countries of peripheral strategic importance to US interests such as Yemen and Morocco. In her contribution, Eva Wegner argues strongly for the EU to emulate the US approach towards the Moroccan Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD) given its legitimacy with a broad Moroccan constituency and moderate, pragmatic approach (i.e. its commitment to non-violence, moderate stance on women's rights, pro-democracy agenda, and the negligible role it attributes to Islamic law).

<sup>1</sup> See Muriel Asseburg (ed.), *Moderate Islamists as Reform Actors. Conditions and Programmatic Change*, Research Paper, No. 4 (Berlin, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2007).

As a rule, when considering whether to include Islamists in programs of civil society cooperation or capacity building, the same standards should apply to Islamists as to other societal and political forces. The degree of engagement with Islamists – again, as with any other actor – should depend on shared interests: the more interests overlap, the more engagement should be expanded; more specifically, engagement could shift from dialogue to inclusion in capacity building or exchange programs, then to project-based cooperation, and finally to partnership. In this, Islamist-secular cooperation initiatives seem particularly worthy of support, as Mona Yacoubian points out in her contribution. Yemen offers an important instance of Islamist-secular cooperation on promoting reform in the face of an authoritarian regime. In Yemen, the Islamist *Islah* party has allied itself with a group of secular opposition parties to create a reform-oriented coalition. The coalition has put forward a comprehensive reform platform and yielded limited successes such as pushing for competitive presidential elections. However, Islamist-secular coalitions might not be a partner for Western democracy promoters in more than a handful of cases. Yemen is a feasible context for supporting such a coalition and Jordan holds some realistic promise. In other countries, such as Egypt or Syria, while Islamist-secular reform alliances have sprung up, EU and US support would prove much more difficult (if it were wanted); in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood is not recognized as a legal party, while in Syria it is outlawed and membership is considered a crime.

Engaging Islamists has been most successful in countries where the government is committed to political opening. Where this is not the case, unless it is complemented by a “top-down approach” that addresses the political and legal framework, the inclusion of Islamists in dialogue exercises and capacity-building programs is unlikely to lead to transition or to a substantial opening of regimes. The US and the EU should therefore concentrate their policies first and foremost on pressuring incumbent governments for human rights safeguards and for the liberalization of institutional frameworks to allow non-violent local forces to effectively participate, whatever their political orientation. In many cases that would include, amongst other measures, a push for reform of electoral laws to make voting more representative, and support for domestic and international election monitoring to make voting more transparent and credible.

### **Democracy Promotion and Fighting Terrorism**

Felix Heiduk’s contribution stresses two problems that arise from conflicting interests and careless analysis in Western support for the democratic transition in Indonesia, the world’s biggest Muslim majority country. The first problem has to do with the overriding interest in combating terrorism in Southeast Asia, which has led the US to closely cooperate with the Indonesian military – a force with a particularly bad human rights record that has been an obstacle to reform rather than an agent of it. The second

problem goes back to simplistic assumptions made by foreign actors who treat Indonesia's secular forces as progressive and democratic, while considering Islamists to be backward and anti-democratic. In reality, however, while there is a radical as well as a terrorist strand of Islamism in Indonesia, there are also numerous Islamists and moderate Muslim parties that have acted as promoters of democratic reform and could well be considered partners on governance issues, regardless of their socially conservative views.

Despite advances in both Indonesia's transition to democracy and its efforts to combat terrorism, one worrying trend is the persistence of simmering communal conflicts that pit Muslims against Christians in the Moluccas and Sulawesi. These conflicts represent a threat to democracy and have been used by Islamist terror networks to mobilize, recruit and train over the past decade. Indonesia thus vividly illustrates the close connection between democracy promotion and conflict resolution. As Heiduk observes, anti-democratic actors instrumentalize violent threats to state stability – whether terrorism or identity conflicts – to preserve authoritarian modes of governance.

### **State Building and the Peaceful Transformation of Conflicts**

Indeed, the greatest threat to US and EU interests does not emanate from authoritarian regimes, but rather from violent conflict, fragile states, and the spillover effects they create in the form of terrorism, organized crime, drug trafficking and refugee flows. Despite acknowledgement of this reality in recent American and European security strategies, comprehensive approaches for conflict settlement and state building have not been devised. Instead, what we have witnessed in many cases has been the reduction of international engagement to approaches that emphasize either military stabilization (as in Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan), or the alleviation of humanitarian consequences of conflict instead of tackling its root causes (see, for example, Darfur). Some conflicts in the region have been perceived as religious conflicts between Islamist radicals and moderate, pro-Western forces. In these conflicts, Western responses have been subjugated to interests related to combating terrorism rather than inclusive conflict settlement and a focus on state and institution building.

That is particularly true for Somalia, a case that Annette Weber analyses. Here, the stand-off between the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) on the one hand, and the Ethiopian backed transitional government and Ethiopian troops on the other, has returned the country to violence, massive instability, and a flow of refugees and internally displaced persons after a short period of stabilization under the rule of the Islamic Courts. The US emphasis on counterterrorism and the conflicting positions of EU member states have hampered a coordinated response to conflict in Somalia. Meanwhile, the conflict has been reinforcing conflict lines in the Horn of Africa, posing the danger of a violent escalation and a wider conflagration. States that identify as Christian in the region, such as Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia,

and Southern Sudan's autonomous government have been supporting the TFG and have received support and military backing from the US. Sudan and Eritrea, along with Egypt and other Muslim majority states in the region, have supported the UIC. Though fault lines in the Horn are considerably more complex, many observers find evidence of a clash of civilizations in the religious rhetoric in Somalia's conflict and the regional alliances that have formed around it. This view of conflict, in the Horn as elsewhere, obscures the interests driving conflict and impedes its settlement.

Similar regional antagonisms have fuelled conflicts in Sudan, as Dorina Bekoe explains in her contribution. As with Somalia, a coherent international approach towards Sudan has been compromised by various interests working at cross-purposes. The complexity of the intertwined conflicts in Sudan requires an approach that can deal simultaneously with the marginalization of the South, Darfur, and the East of the country, rather than tackling these conflicts piecemeal. The lack of such an approach has been vividly illustrated by the inordinate focus on an intervention force for Darfur as the landmark North-South peace deal falters.

### **Engaging Islamists in Conflict Settlements**

As Weber and Bekoe both argue for Somalia and Sudan, durable conflict settlements require inclusive arrangements that engage all relevant stakeholders and veto actors in wealth and power sharing arrangements. This is also the case for conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Palestine, where Islamist actors cannot be ignored or sidelined. Indeed, while it makes sense to insist on non-violence when looking for partners in democracy promotion, this is not a viable approach in the midst of armed conflicts, where local actors, Europeans, and Americans have little choice regarding which forces to engage. If conflict settlement is the aim, a commitment to certain values and non-violence cannot be the criteria for engagement. Rather, all relevant parties to a conflict that are open to negotiations need to be included; only those actors unwilling to cooperate constructively or work within the parameters of any potentially realistic settlement should be isolated. And as important, Europeans and Americans should refrain from arming militias, such as Fatah in Palestine or the Lebanese militias linked to those forces considered pro-Western, in order to counterbalance Islamist militants.

Also, it is essential that European and American policies seek to reduce the grievances on which violent actors thrive. One of the approaches is the long acknowledged need for increased support of state building efforts – that is, support for structures that can provide basic state functions of security, welfare and legitimacy. This will not always mean strengthening the institutions of central government; in some cases, such as Southern Sudan, a decentralized approach is more realistic. Still, a basic level of shared legitimacy and effective institutions at the national level are

needed in order to avoid recurrent conflict, guarantee basic human rights, and provide a space in which political actors can negotiate compromise.

### **Coordination or Cooperation or Division of Labor?**

Not all policy fields lend themselves to close transatlantic cooperation. In the field of democracy promotion, for example, it seems more promising to coordinate policies rather than cooperate, at least at the current juncture. The EU and its member states, or at least most of them, still possess greater credibility with some countries and populations in the region because they have not been involved in violent regime change – an asset that could be compromised by close EU-US cooperation. Also, the experience of the BMENA initiative, a US-initiated project that has provoked overwhelmingly negative feelings in the region, suggests that it is wiser to operate outside frameworks that are easily perceived as neo-imperial grand designs of the West, reinforcing perceptions of a clash of civilizations.

At the same time, closer coordination between donors around analysis, information sharing, and approaches would be of much use – not only between the US and the EU, but also among Europeans. Policymakers should also be aware that symbolic politics matter; messages at the government level set the climate in which democracy promoters work. The messages of high-level politicians are carefully interpreted and acted upon by incumbent regimes in the region. Yet western leaders have sent mixed signals, on the one hand loudly demanding reform, on the other publicly cozying up to authoritarian leaders. For instance, the US Secretary of State forcefully demanded a political opening and clean elections in the region at the American University in Cairo in June 2005, only to later have European governments embrace Libya's authoritarian leader, Muammar al Ghaddafi.

In spite of the acute threats violent conflicts generate for EU and US security, policies have focused on addressing the symptoms of conflict rather than its causes, and conflict resolution efforts have been largely relegated to the backburner. Yet it is exactly the issues of state building, conflict prevention and resolution that should be on the top of the agenda towards the Muslim world – not least because it is the lack of governance, violent conflict, and Western double standards in dealing with parties to these conflicts, both perceived and real, on which extremist and militant Islamists thrive. In the field of state and nation building, close coordination and a division of labor between Americans and Europeans (as well as other countries concerned) might be sufficient. Where conflict resolution and regional stabilization are concerned, however, a concerted effort that goes beyond the US and the EU to include the P5 and all other relevant stakeholders is required.

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